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American Duck Bills

DUCK stamps and the American way with wildfowl still have supporters amongst our own wildfowlers who would like to see the American system of conservation applied to this country. Apart from any other impracticability, however, it appears from current problems on that continent that shooting men are discovering new difficulties in a system that sounds to some of us ideal.

During the past twenty years sportsmen have contributed nearly 50 million dollars to the Federal wildfowl programme through the purchase of duck stamps. They were lead to believe that the money would be used to acquire lands for duck and goose refuges. But only 4½ million dollars has been spent for land; while the remainder has gone for operating expenses of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

For this reason, many people are opposing the raising of the price of the duck stamp as the sole means of obtaining additional funds for hastening the acquisition of lands for the national refuges system. Increasing the fee alone, they say, would, in effect, legalise the use that has been made of the funds for routine operating expenses during the past twenty years.

There is a strong feeling that the Federal Government should be shouldering more of its obligations under the terms of the Migratory Bird Treaties for the preservation of duck and geese. Shooting men are asking why they alone should be providing practically all the funds to help preserve a resource that benefits and is enjoyed by a large segment of the public. Many are insisting that the Federal Government should be assisting in this effort to preserve and perpetuate wildfowl through the provision of matching funds or some other method that would assure regular annual appropriations.

Many also believe that the Federal Government should be assisting the states in preserving marshes and potholes for the use of duck and geese. Such "wetlands" offer excellent places for nesting, resting, and feeding purposes.

Some want all the lands acquired for game management purposes kept open to public shooting, while others ask that the areas be held as sanctuaries. Leading wildfowl authorities say that about 40 per cent of refuges larger than 5,000 acres could be opened to shooting without danger to the duck and goose resources.

These authorities insist, however, that the small wetland tracts or potholes that might be acquired or leased should be handled separately and apart from the national refuge system. Those small areas are needed for specific water uses — by nesting, feeding, or resting fowl — during only a brief period each year, and their most important function is to be available when those needs arise.

No one is objecting to the desirability of acquiring and developing sufficient land for wildfowl, but to the methods by which each of the three bills now in Congress for this purpose, would accomplish a common goal.

If any real progress is to be made in correcting the misuse of the duck stamp funds and getting the wildfowl refuge programme moving, it would appear that the important issue now becomes the drafting of a new bill that contains the points that the many interested conservationists and sportsmen want to have included.

THE SHOOTING TIMES AND COUNTRY MAGAZINE

Official Organ of THE WILDFOWLERS' ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

No. 3908 FRIDAY, AUGUST 2, 1957 Founded 1882

The wild life of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust. We must account for it to those who come after.—King George VI.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Rabbits Again in Demand

In *The Birmingham Post* I read that a Staffordshire farmer recently back from New Zealand where he has been making a study of rabbit extermination methods, has suggested that the establishment of some authority similar to the rabbit boards found in New Zealand should be considered. Established by Parliamentary legislation, but financed and controlled by farmers, the boards undertake extermination of rabbits. The sale of rabbit meat and skins, both at home and abroad, is banned.

He has met opposition. The secretary of the Birmingham Wholesale Poultry, Game and Rabbit Merchants' Association said that any move to establish a rabbit board, especially one prohibiting the sale of rabbits, would be opposed. Rabbits are again available in the shops and although supplies are still small the public demand is large, which leads me to suppose that the public, as well as the rabbits are getting over myxomatosis.

Fowling Club Secretaries

With over 70 wildfowling clubs in existence round our coasts and readers constantly enquiring about all or any of them, it is obviously of paramount importance that this journal, which is the official organ of The Wildfowlers' Association, should be able to supply the current names and addresses of the secretaries of these clubs.

Sometimes, however, club secretaries change quite unbeknown to us or to the hard-working secretary of W.A.G.B.I., which throws both parties into confusion and slows down the smooth running of an ever-growing organisation.

This can easily be avoided if new club secretaries will notify us and W.A.G.B.I.'s secretary immediately there is any change of secretaryship.

Will all concerned please note this and take the appropriate action.

Shooting Rights

I do not think David Imrie will mind if I elaborate on a point raised in his article this week, just in case there are any readers who are not quite clear on the matter.

The Protection of Birds Act 1954 is irrelevent to the matter of shooting rights between landlord and tenant; it has not altered the law in that respect at all, either in England or Scotland.

In old tenancy agreements of farms the landlord's reservation was sometimes "of the game." This only included those creatures defined as "game," and thus did not include wildfowl. The words used almost always in such leases today reserve to the landlord "the exclusive right to sport, hunt, shoot and fish." In other words, *all* the sporting rights are reserved, not merely the right to the "game."

If there is no reservation in the lease the sporting rights pass to the tenant, as far as English law is concerned. But such a tenant cannot use firearms at night (sec. 6 Ground Game Act 1880). However any properly draughted tenancy agreement of agricultural land contains a full reservation of all sporting rights to the landlord. No such agreement can negative the tenants' concurrent right to kill ground game as provided in the 1880 Act.

The Speed of Birds

Some interesting correspondence on this subject has recently come to light in our Letters pages. By a strange coincidence a few days ago I came across a reference to bird speeds in *The Scientific American*.

"The measurement of a bird's speed capabilities is a very uncertain and tricky thing," says John H. Storer, and "a great deal of nonsense has been uttered on this subject." He gives a table of some cruising and top bird speeds, some of which I list here.

A Canada goose in easy flight travels at some 20 m.p.h., but pressed by a plane it steps it up to 45-60 m.p.h. A mallard similarly plane-pressed flies at 55-60 m.p.h., while the average top speed of a pheasant is quoted as 60 m.p.h.

The fastest bird mentioned, again pressed by plane, is the duck hawk—a "jet" amongst birds doing 175-180 m.p.h., while the slowest is the woodcock flying at speeds between 5 and 13 m.p.h. Most of the woodcock I meet, however, seem considerably more nippy.

Game Reports

The response to my earlier plea for game reports has been most encouraging. Some of the results readers can see in this issue. Not for a long time have we been able to cover grouse news so thoroughly; nor for many years, incidentally, has it sounded so favourable.

Many of our readers, I know, never get the chance of seeing, let alone shooting a grouse, but I am sure they will agree that news of any game bird — especially good news — is interesting.

In any case, the partridge and pheasant man and the wildfowler will each have his turn in due course, for we shall be publishing news from manor, covert and marsh within the next few weeks.

AUCEPS.

A corner of the Breach Ponds on the landward side of the sea-wall.

THE CHANGING SCENE

by Tower-Bird

LAST season, I did very little shooting on Pagham Harbour, enjoying only two or three morning flights, and those nowhere near the shingle-beach. Indeed, I did not see that pebbled rampart between sea and harbour at all during the 1956-57 season, except through the telescope. In previous seasons, I had spent many long hours on or near the shingle-bank flighting duck and curlew; and a couple of years or so ago, in that wild winter which brought death and destruction round our coasts, I sat and watched a gale-torn sea starting to pound a breach in the bank a few hundred yards or less from the harbour-mouth which divides the bank from the buttressed shingle on the Church Norton side, and through which the wind-driven winter tides run like a millrace.

In due course, the breech was made, and two harbour-mouths were in existence until last year. Then came more pounding and sucking of waves on the narrow shingle-bank, and the sea broke through mid-way along the bank close to where the Pagham Harbour Wildfowlers' Association keep their boats. Now, in a manner of speaking, there is no shingle-bank between the new breach and the old harbour-mouth by the Church Norton shore—only an island of shingle which might well vanish in the face of storms in the near future.

To me it looks as if the present main channel may, when another great storm and hammering or two occur, be driven right through into the Lagoon, and one even scratches ones head and looks at the newly-fortified sea-wall between harbour and Breach Ponds which later lie on the landward side of the wall at the Pagham end of the Pagham-Sidlesham bank. If a breach ever did occur here, one asks oneself, how far would a high spring tide, driven by a gale spread across the adjoining countryside? It seems, moreover, a question which is well worthy of consideration, though no doubt the authorities concerned have studied the matter and formed their plans. Anyway, to see this "new harbour" was an exciting experience for me, for many of us have a deep affection for the place, small though it is, it being less than 1,500 acres between the walls.

Hours Remembered

On a calm autumn afternoon at a full, small spring tide, I have seen the harbour resembling a "Mediterranean lake," its bright blue waters as still as glass, its scores of small islands formed by the tips of spartina grass showing above the surface, glowing orange in the sunlight. I have also seen it resembling a rough sea, with white-crested waves roaring across it; with lines of brent geese and packs of wigeon battling up-wind from the sea to settle far out on a harbour which seemed no harbour at all, but one with the gale, the raging sea beyond, and the crests and spume of gigantic waves smashing on the narrow, shifting bulwark of the shingle-beach.

Morning and Evening Flights

Again, at dawn, I have watched the moon sink and the sun rise, as the tide made; listened to the quacking of mallard and the thin piping of teal on the splashes on the landward side of the wall; watched the vague, dark forms of inland-feeding duck coming in to harbour and sea high overhead against the faint, growing light and the still-bright stars; watched the great amadas of gulls weaving outwards in straggled battalions and in well-formed echelon to feeding grounds far inland; heard the morning chorus of burbling and calling curlew, and the first wild crying of redshank saluting a flowing tide.

And, of an evening, I have watched large flocks of plover flying out over the sea-wall, with high above them the evening flight of mallard; have stood often enough on a wave-lapped shore waiting for the big wigeon flocks to leave the sea and flight into the harbour, or far out to the flood-water inland. And my shooting partner and I have sat for hours at a stretch (from before dawn to "opening time") shooting at teal which came zipping off the harbour and vanished over the fresh marshes, to settle on the wandering rife, or have come off the rife and appeared suddenly only inches above the sea-wall, going like bats out of hell, and flaring heavenwards at our first shots.

Oh yes, we have enjoyed wonderful and occasionally profitable days on that little harbour, but often for days on end one is lucky to shoot a single duck. Last year, for instance, in common with most coastal shooting grounds, the fowling was very poor. Perhaps I should mention here that the shooting is private, being rented by the Pagham Wildfowlers' Association, the harbour *not* being part of Crown property, but the property of a private estate. Periodically the mouth of the harbour alters its position as the sea breaches the shingle-bank, sealing up presently the old mouth; and at times the harbour has been land-locked and partly cultivated.

After visiting Pagham on this day, we went on to Chichester Harbour for a committee meeting of the Chichester Harbour Wildfowlers' Association, but first making a short tour of our winter shooting grounds there, noting how, while scores of young shelduck have grown to half-size, there are still scores more of tiny duckling bobbing about the tide like countless little corks—this on July 20.

A Very Tricky Water

The tides and currents of this complicated harbour need very careful study by the fowler. I learned that during my earliest and lonely forays there. You may look at your Tide Table in winter and note the time and height of, say, a full spring tide. You may make your plans accordingly. But the wind may change suddenly, from one which was blowing towards the sea and holding up the tide against the harbour bar; it may change and now release a mighty tide, blown by a gale, up the estuaries, this race of sea-water meeting a high pressure of flood-water pouring down from the surrounding hills and countryside. When the twain meet, I have seen an upheaval as though King Neptune himself sat beneath the waters and heaved upwards mightily.

With a reasonable tide all manner of things come into the harbour and up the channels, apart from shoals of bass, mullett, plenty of flats, etc. Porpoises at times jump there, and an occasional seal lifts a face above the surface to grin at the surprised fowler waiting in the reeds at the mouth of a freshwater stream for wigeon, mallard, and teal to drop in for a wash and brush-up.

Often enough the surface of the gutter is deceptive.

Chichester Harbour is a very tricky water in winter, and, though fruitful enough to the fowler during a long spell of hard weather when duck have been flying south for days and nights on end, he has to learn to shoot there the hard way, and it may take him several seasons to get to know the good places

(Continued on page 608, col. 3)

THE ADUR VALLEY

by R. N. Winnall

The river above Shoreham.

MENTION of the Adur Valley Wildfowlers' Club in recent issues brings to mind many memories; for I spent five years of my life within sight of the Adur and have visited it on a number of occasions since that period. I have swum in it, bird watched on its banks, bird nested in the meadows around it, fished in it once or twice, and taken a gun along it many times, though never perhaps with a great deal of success.

In the old days, long before my time and mass bungalow building and Shoreham airfield, the lower parts of the Adur Valley and the shingles between Shoreham and Worthing were good fowling grounds and not infrequently visited by rare birds, many of which found their way into the Booth collection at Brighton. That, of course, was in the collectors' age, not the present one of bird-watcher and photographer; but all the same the perusal of such records as exist is interesting enough. The local fowlers were few and keen; one or two of them, in particular a certain S. Maple, were also ornithologically-minded. The situation was very different from what it became in later days, when during a period of extreme cold in 1929 I once counted twenty-one fowlers within less than a mile on the banks above Old Shoreham bridge.

Past and Present

In the "high and far off times," however, this surfeit of gunners was unknown, and one feels, after reading the records, that anything might have happened, and sometimes it did. There was the spoonbill, for example, shot by S. Maple near the site of Shoreham airfield about 1885. It was said to have planed down on to the Brighton-Worthing road and collapsed almost under the feet of the horses of a travelling coach. The same Maple in his time shot whooper swans, a barnacle goose, avocets and a ruff, besides many lesser but equally interesting specimens, including on one occasion four little gulls. Now, of course, the lower reaches of the Adur are not what they were. Harbour works, building and an airfield have all contrived to lessen its potentialities as a fowling district, and even thirty years ago there was not a great deal about except in severe weather. All the same I have in my time seen about seven species of duck in its immediate vicinity, and Sussex bird records mention about four more seen either by the river itself, in the sea off Shoreham (where on January 10, 1881 C. E. T. Booth shot both a common eider and a scoter) or in districts not very far removed from it such as the Ladywell Valley below Lancing College, where Maple shot a pintail in 1890, and the Widewater at Lancing (now called the Broadwater and reduced in size to a mere pond), on which a long-tailed duck was shot in 1876.

These records, even if they do savour of "old mortality," are nevertheless interesting and certainly indicate that in those days the marshes of the lower Adur must have been very pleasant places to the small band of fowlers who frequented them. I do not doubt that it is still possible to see scoters in the sea off Shoreham, but a long-tailed duck on the Broadwater is a very unlikely event in these days, with buses running right past it, and I have never seen a pintail at all, though I daresay they may occur in the upper reaches towards Henfield.

One of the creeks running down to the Adur.

Even in the late 1920s, when I was a very green and inexperienced fowler, whose knowledge was theoretical rather than practical, for I had scarcely raised a gun at a duck, I can remember things that stirred me to a pitch of excitement. I saw my first wild geese above Old Shoreham bridge in 1925. Greylags they were, as I know now, but did not at the time. On free afternoons I used to consort in those days with an old man who was gardener, turf cutter, builder, poacher and wildfowler all in one. At a later period of our acquaintance I used to borrow his gun for the afternoon and pay him for the cartridges I used, but I do not recollect that I ever shot anything with it. On this particular occasion, however, I was walking along the bank with him when we discovered about five geese feeding in the large meadow above the bridge. I shall never forget my youthful chagrin and disappointment when two gunners on the opposite bank brought one of the birds down and we returned home gooseless.

On another afternoon, in December, 1928, when it was extremely cold, I went into Worthing on some special errand with a friend. I forget the purpose of the excursion, but I do recollect catching a bus back along the Worthing-Brighton road and taking a short cut along the path through the airfield and adjacent farmland to get back to college. It was flight time and a bitter frost. As we walked the duck started to come in and although there were not very many of them, they were all within shot. One flight of mallard circled low right past us near an old barn (called, I believe, Lees barn) where a gunner was waiting for them. I think he missed and probably cursed our presence into the bargain. On the following morning I contrived to borrow a gun from a friendly housemaster and shot my first snipe with the first shot, an event I have often wondered at on more doleful occasions since that time.

A Mixed Bag

I also shot my first teal by the Adur a year later. That occurred further upstream towards the Beeding cement works. I well remember the excitement which that incurred and how we floundered through a piece of very wet marshland to retrieve it. Most of my expeditions took place along the lower reaches between Old Shoreham bridge and the cement works, and they were somewhat varied in quality. Lapwing shooting (in those days one could do it), snipe shooting in the meadows, and more often than not just a stroll along the banks to see what could be picked up. If the weather was hard there would be a few duck about and sometimes a curlew or two, though these were never very much in evidence. All the same it must be recorded that a curlew shot in 1929 was the third of my "first evers" to be killed by the Adur, the aforementioned snipe and teal being the other two.

I think probably that the reaches above Bramber were at that time a good deal more secluded, and probably still are. It was my sorrow that I never had very much opportunity to get as far as that. I managed it once during the very severe frost of 1929, when I was no longer a schoolboy, and again about six years later. Of the first occasion I have two clear recollections: one of obtaining a right and left at stock-doves as they came down to the river, presumably to drink, for almost every other piece of water was frozen; the second of missing quite disgracefully an old drake golden-eye that I surprised on the water.

Retrieving a Tufted

Some time elapsed after this episode before I again visited the Adur as a fowler and then, apart from various redshank and plover, the only thing of note that I shot was a tufted duck just above Old Shoreham bridge. I remember that very well because it fell in the middle of the river and I had to follow it down almost to the railway bridge before it was close enough to the bank for me to retrieve. Even so the act was not accomplished without a flooding of thigh boots. As it was a drake in very good plumage, I had its head mounted, and it still hangs on the wall of my room.

Two or three years after this I made my second visit to the reaches above Bramber with a friend who had a shoot adjoining the river. Some of the ground was very marshy and at the time the weather was frosty enough to bring a quantity of teal into the dykes. We saw a large number of birds, forty or fifty according to my game diary, and killed three of them as well as two hares. I also find it noted that we had a brief unsuccessful encounter with some golden plover, and on the following morning, when we rose early to flight, saw two or three mallard, but had no shots.

I have not shot along the Adur since that morning in 1937. Yet I always look back on my activities there with affection. At one time the muddy river, its bird life, and sometimes its fish (I wonder by the way if a few sea-trout still manage to run up it), were nearly the breath of life to me. I saw it and came to know it in all states of weather and at at all times of year; at dawn, daylight, dusk and moonlight. But, above all, I used to like it best on a fine winter morning on those rare occasions when ice sheets came downstream on an ebbing tide and a strong north wind sent the smoke from the cement works chimney unwaveringly in the same direction.

His Own Worst Enemy

The wildfowler is a fatalist. He has to be or he would probably shoot himself. The attitude of "What has to be will be" is forced on him and while this may lessen his everyday problems it can be a dangerous outlook. For the wildfowler's worst enemy is himself. His easy going acceptance of the buffetings of fate leads him to overlook deliberate and insidious attempts to curtail his sport.—*The Wildfowler Magazine.*

GROUSE PROSPECTS FOR 1957

ALTHOUGH there is an old saying, conceived obviously by some dreary pessimist, to warn us when we become too hopeful that there can be a slip 'twixt cup and lip, we nevertheless feel fairly confident that grouse this coming season will be more numerous, both in England and in Scotland, than they have been for several years. We know that this is a bold statement to make at a time when the young broods are not yet strong on wing, but we intend to stick to it; for surely nothing short of a widespread disaster could nullify all those good reports which we have received recently from moorland keepers and shooting men.

At the same time, we must utter a word of caution just in case this estimate should be taken to mean that a bumper season is in store. That is not so. Stocks of old grouse during the spring were rather too modest almost everywhere; but on the other hand, they were sufficiently good to ensure an advance on the bags of last year. We have said "almost everywhere," because rather strangely, and despite the present grouse inquiry, which was evolved to investigate dwindling stocks on the moors, one shoot at least had its record bag of 3,500 brace three years ago, and a few other favoured moors have somehow managed to escape the general depression of the last 17 or 18 years.

However they are the exceptions. The majority of moors are pulling back slowly to the happy level of the 1930s. And we can only hope that there will be no major setback in the near future to halt this steady advance. Apart from the cash value of grouse shooting, which is considerable, we should like to see once again a run of good grouse seasons for the pleasure that they give to tired businessmen and—dispirited gamekeepers!

A review of this successful breeding time must begin long before an egg was laid—in winter and early spring in fact. This period was notable for its unusually genial weather. Grouse remained on their own heaths, and the mortality rate among them was low. Therefore, they were in splendid fettle at the beginning of April. They nested early. One Yorkshire keeper reported chicks in the last week of that month, and a Scottish keeper saw a strong brood in the first week of May. This means, of course, that birds will be strong on the Twelfth.

Severe May Snowstorm

But it would not be correct to say that the breeding time everywhere has been uniformly good, as far as weather is concerned. In central Scotland there was a severe snowstorm about May 9. One keeper reported six inches of snow on his moor; another did not give the general depth, but he said that some drifts were between six and eight feet deep. His ground is, however, a long way above sea level, and is partly deer forest. In Yorkshire a keeper near Bradford told of two nights of frost which, however, did not affect adversely any of the nests known to him.

This Yorkshire keeper also mentioned his worry from the very real danger of fire at the height of the heat wave, which parched all the moors of England and Scotland in June. Last year part of his ground was burned accidentally by someone's carelessness; so the fear of another outbreak was constantly with him, until the rain came. But there were fires elsewhere. Whether they did or did not do serious damage we do not know yet. They were still burning deep down in the peat when a shooting man sent in a report from the neighbourhood of Keighley. A Scottish keeper, who had no runaway fires on his moor, maintained however that the intense sunshine did no good to the young broods, although he forecast a fair shooting season for himself.

Verbatim Reports

But it would perhaps be better if we let the moorland men speak for themselves. Verbatim reports have an interesting quality of their own, no matter who has written them. So we will begin with Royal Deeside. This was sent by a keeper: "There certainly seems to be an improvement in the grouse in this part of Deeside now. The splendid weather at nesting time has helped us wonderfully, and clutches of eight and nine eggs were common. Occasionally we found nests with 10 and 12. We had rather a wild snowstorm about the beginning of May. I was out on the hill the day after the snow fell, and I rose two grouse from eggs where two inches of snow were lying around them. This late fall soon cleared. In fact, most of the snow had disappeared the next day.

"We had fine weather when most broods would be hatching, then a week later we had three or four days of heavy showers, though not cold. Anyway, this wet time does not seem to have done any harm at all. One thing has pleased me particularly. I have seen very few hen birds this summer without chicks.

"As for disease, there has been none, nor so far has there been any unexpected trouble, which might seriously affect the Twelfth. I asked another keeper what his views were, and he said it had been the best hatching season on Deeside for many years."

Nearby in Kincardineshire a keeper who has a moor attached to the low ground shoot says briefly: "Regarding grouse, anyone with whom I have spoken seems to be well pleased with them at the moment, and those that I have seen here are doing well; healthy birds and good coveys."

Improvement On Last Year

From over the hills in Angus comes this bit of pleasant news from a keeper who has spent all his life among grouse, and who is at this moment on a first-class moor, namely: "The general opinion here is that there will be an improvement on last year's bags. The weather has been extremely favourable since hatching time, although we had a fair amount of rain and coldish weather while the birds were sitting. On the whole, however, the hatching would be up to average, and I have seen very few infertile eggs. Clutches were good, quite a few nines and tens. The average might be nearly eight. I hesitate to put a figure to the size of broods, because I like to leave that estimate until later in the month, when I will do a little hunting up with a dog. Nevertheless, I have been seeing some good coveys. We did have a late spell of snow around the ninth of May, which might have spoiled a nest or two above the fifteen hundred feet mark, but I personally have seen no signs of damage. The snow lasted for about three days, and there was drifting on the higher tops."

His neighbour farther back among the hills in the direction of Balmoral did not feel inclined to say much. On that high-lying terrain he has probably seen young grouse fade away mysteriously between hatching time and the Twelfth, and that breeds caution. This is part of his report: "We had snow in May, but only for 36 hours; so it did not do the harm it might have done, though no doubt it did a bit on the high ground. Drifts were from six to eight feet deep. The burning sun which we are having now has also taken its toll of young birds on the dry parts of the moor. Otherwise prospects are fairly good, but we are still some time from the Twelth yet!"

From a small moor on the braes of Angus adjoining the arable land comes the only unfavourable report; but we must bear in mind that all grouse ground is not alike. At the best of times this moor has not produced a three figure bag; therefore it must be put into the second or third class. Our correspondent says: "A few more birds than usual have been barren. Freak cloud-bursts have also killed off some of the young grouse, and any coveys which I have seen were small, four or five chicks at the most."

Much better is the news from farther inland. This well-keepered moor in the Brechin

(Continued on page 615, col. 1)

Reports from the Moors

by J. Wentworth Day

"YOU can put it on record now that this is going to be the best grouse season for many years. That is quite certain in this area, but I believe it will be true of all well-keepered moors all over the country. Yesterday I saw several strong broods, fully three-quarters grown and flying strongly. It is the first time in my life I have dared to make such a definite statement so early in the year."

That cheerful epistle is dated June 20 in this Year of Inflation, 1957, and was sent me by Mr. J. R. Scott who is headkeeper on the famous Dallowgill Moors near Ripon. Mr. Scott is probably one of the best moorland keepers alive.

Let us, therefore, cast back to a letter he wrote just about a month previously, on May 15. Therein he said: "Everything has gone splendidly on the moors. Mildest weather for many years. Grouse in tip-top fettle. Good clutches. Vermin well under control. The heather just putting forth its nice succulent green shoots in time for the young birds hatching out this week. Today, I held young grouse chicks in my hand for the first time this year. They would be perhaps two or three days old, were strong and vigorous and ran off like little ostriches when I put them down. An old keeper friend crossed the corner of our moor last week-end and swears we will have a record-breaking season. He has been in this district much longer than I, and ought to know, and, though I hesitate to make such a dogmatic statement, I feel more than a little confident that this season will give the sporting Press something more to chew on than they have had for some considerable time, i.e. if the weather remains favourable for the next five or six weeks . . . that darned two-letter word that makes fools of us all."

So much for the intelligent forecast of a highly intelligent moor-keeper, whose book of wisdom and experience I hope soon to father through the Press. It will, in my view, be the best thing written since poor old Dugald Macintyre departed from the scenes which he adorned and benefitted for so many years.

Let us regard the words of another wise man of the Yorkshire moors, my old friend, Mr. Edward H. Peat, who retired last year, after very many years as headkeeper on the Duke of Devonshire's moors at Ronksley and Birchenlea, high above the Derbyshire Derwent, where, under Peat's superb generalship, truly remarkable bags were made. I have happy and enduring memories of those moors.

Mr. Peat writes, from his retirement near Chesterfield: "I have got in touch with several moor-keepers in North Derbyshire and South Yorkshire. All give a very good report. Nests were well up to average or a little above. They hatched well and have done very well and are very forward. Thank you, I am very well and enjoying my retirement. The Duke found me a very nice house on the Hardwicke Estate, but . . . just for something to do, I have been killing vermin on a 4,600 acre shoot near here. Up to date I have killed over 300 head, including 133 magpies and 30 carrion crows."

Keepering For Fun

This grand old man of the moors is, if I recollect rightly, in his seventies, but still full of fire and a dead shot. His "keepering for fun" has resulted in him being made a free shooting member of the syndicate which runs the 4,600 acres. Other syndicates might note the moral.

Scottish prospects are, perhaps, summed up best in a letter from my friend, Sir John Craster of Craster, who writes on June 26: "Lord Inchcape had told me last autumn to keep the whole of the last week of August free for grouse driving in Angus, but his secretary rang me up the other day to ask me to come for August 12-17 instead, as prospects were so good that he intends to drive right from the start of the season!"

Angus was always favoured of the gods of grouse, and it looks this year as if they will do better than even they have done for some years past.

From farther north, the Hon. Francis de Moleyns, who, with his wife, the former Lady Ross, runs the vast Balnagown Estates Company, Limited, with its 300,000 acres or so of grouse shootings, stalking, low ground shootings and salmon fishing, from Balnagown Castle, Kildary, Ross-shire, whence they operate the Benmore Lodge Hotel, Braelangwell Lodge Hotel, and Balnagown Arms Hotel, writes: "I would say that grouse prospects are far above the average, not only on our moors, but those all over the north of Scotland. On our moors, the keepering is, I am pleased to say, first-class, but I refer chiefly to other ground, some of which is not keepered at all. This universal increase in grouse should benefit, for several seasons to come, the moors that are well managed and keepered as, in my view, grouse are migratory and will find and settle on the moors which give them what they want, coupled with freedom from attack by vermin.

"Our keepers are particularly pleased with the heather this year which, they say, has never been better and this will also benefit the increased grouse population.

"At Balnagown we are not starting to shoot grouse until Saturday, August 31. Most of our shooting will be 'driven' and during the last year, we have been busy in constructing new butts, etc."

A More Hopeful Mood

An equally optimistic note comes from Mr. Gilbert Brown, Chief Factor to the Strathspey Estates at Grantown-on-Spey. He writes:

"It is a pleasure to be able to write in a more hopeful mood about game of all kinds in this district. Whether it is that the stock of birds are improving in a natural way, or the mild winter and good hatching weather have had the necessary effect it is difficult to say, but in any case there is that improvement we have been looking for.

"Grouse looked well throughout the winter, many nested early and hatched out well, rarely were addled eggs left in the nest. In consequence it can be said that the coveys are well-grown, and number from six to nine young. If this improvement continues and reasonable shooting is carried out for this season, it does appear that next year the stock of birds ought to be moving in the right direction."

The good news—and Scots are notably cautious—is reinforced from Edinburgh, where Mr. A. Sinclair, the Managing Director of John Dickson and Sons, those good old Scottish gunmakers, writes:

"As far as grouse are concerned estate owners and their gamekeepers have not been so optimistic about prospects for many years. Birds wintered well and the weather, during the nesting and since, has been, especially on our local low moors, most favourable.

"On ground where a reasonable breeding stock was left last year, there seems to be little doubt that a big improvement of grouse stocks will be found when shooting commences.

"So far only one report of disease, and this was a rather indefinite one, has been received from local moors." Trust a gunmaker to keep his ear to the ground.

Larger Broods

Mr. D. M. Chance, who has several thousand acres of good shooting at the Ormidale Sporting Hotel, Glendaruel, Argyll, writes:

"Prospects in this area are better than for the past four or five years. The birds had a good winter, a good nesting season and what coveys I have seen have been seven to ten young birds and well grown."

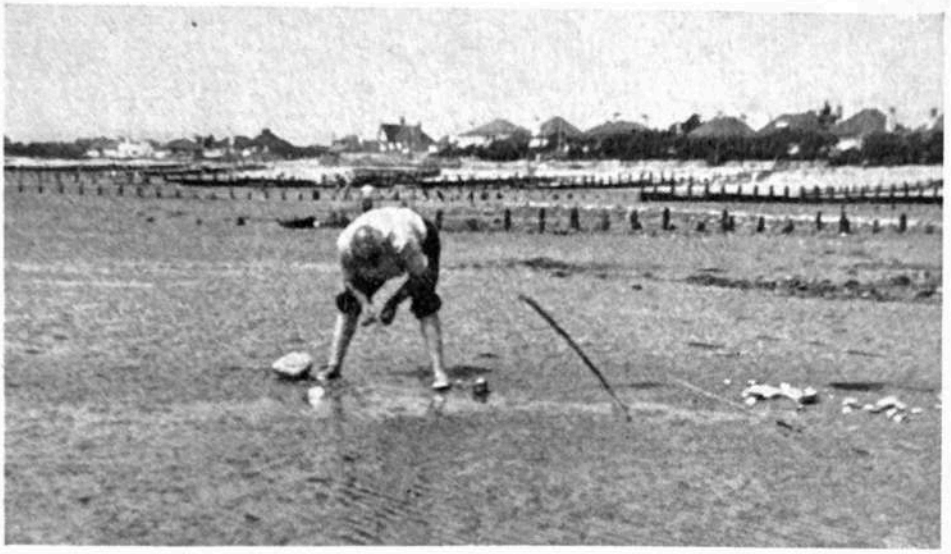
Mr. D. E. Pattison, Estate Agent to the Earl of Lonsdale at Lowther, is equally optimistic: "Grouse prospects appear to be excellent as the broods are larger than in previous years, were on the wing early and appear to be very healthy."

Sir Fergus Graham, Bart., M.P., who owns the Netherby Estate near Carlisle writes me that he thinks "the grouse should be quite good this year."

So much then for the considered opinions of a representative number of landowners, keepers, and others in Scotland and England, up to the third week in July. I have no news from the Principality of Wales. Nevertheless, let us hope that the Ruabon Moors and those few others which were notable in the past can raise their heads afresh this season.

A good Welsh grouse moor can be *very* good indeed — provided that it has twice as many keepers as the same acreage in Scotland or England.

Smiles of satisfaction as the bag is gathered—a scene which may be more common this year.



Taking up a long line before the holidaymakers storm the beach.

The Young Shot

A Two Tone Labrador

by Petrel

WHAT, I wonder, would be your reaction if you were walking across a heath and you suddenly came face to face with four woodcock chicks about a week old. If you were quick thinking and had read the recent woodcock correspondence in this journal, I have no doubt that you would immediately conceal yourself in the nearest available cover, kick yourself for not always carrying a camera, and settle down in the hope of seeing the hen bird appear and perform her air-lift rescue. Or you might in your eagerness, and the absence of the hen, adopt the course of a shooting man who has lately acquired some ground in the neighbourhood of a large American air base.

Catching up the chicks he took them home, and having persuaded his father that they were not, in fact, young peewits, set about trying to rear them. How to feed them was his problem and for the price of a phone call the Wildfowl Trust supplied the answer in the form of a diet sheet listing worms, beetles and many other nourishing items. At the end of a fortnight two of the birds had succumbed to their unnatural conditions but the other pair thrived. When they were fledged their foster-father took them back to the spot where he had found them and built a small wire enclosure, open at the top, in which he placed the birds, with the idea of continuing to feed them until such time as they decided to fly away.

Back To The Fold

One of the survivors lost no time in leaving, and disappeared. But the other was in no hurry to leave regular rations and security—or perhaps it was just plain greedy, for it would fly out of its pen each night—presumably to feed—and return each morning—to accept the offerings of its guardian and rest within the wire throughout the day. As far as I know it was still performing this regular routine until a few days before Friday July 19 when a shooting farmer told me of this unusual occurence.

With the same farmer I discussed local game prospects and was glad to hear that pheasants have done splendidly on his extensive arable acres. He was, however, more concerned about his partridges, which although hatching quite well, were disappearing with alarming regularity, to judge from the depleted broods seen in the vicinity of the farm. Question and answer produced the the most likely reason for this. An earlier survey showed that most of the partridges nested relatively close to the farm, in contrast to the pheasants which were concentrated further out nearer the centre of the shoot. Close to the farm, too, naturally enough, were the corn ricks.

A breeding season which has proved so favourable for game has also favoured other species, including mice, of which the ricks have been full. In search of these mice, from the neighbouring cottages and village, have infiltrated cats in abnormally large numbers. Cats and young partridges do not go well together. Q.E.D. But I cannot help feeling that someone must have been a bit slow to take action.

Black and Yellow

I am glad to see our Kennel Editor gently debunking an idea which, in my opinion, has become rather a fetish amongst wildfowlers. I refer to the question of the colour of fowling dogs and the criticism of black retrievers because they show up too much on marsh and mud. I agree with Peter Moxon that too much is made of this and that stillness on the part of man and dog is generally more important than colour. After all, the wildfowler does most of his shooting in the morning or evening half-light when a black dog is unlikely to stand out with scarifying effect on the birds, whatever the background. Commandos black their faces and Western bad men wore black hats and shirts so that they should be indistinguishable in bad light and shadows, so why should a black dog not be most suitably dressed for its part. The memory of tripping over an invisible black labrador sitting quietly by its master who was clearly discernible against the sky strengthens my opinion that with the possible exception of golden sand, in sunshine, most shore-shooting grounds are dull enough (in colour) not to silhouette a black dog unduly.

The most popular wildfowling dog in this country is without doubt the labrador. The ideal colour for this breed—to please both sides in this colour argument—would be a mixture of black and yellow. But that raises another problem, and I think you will agree, if you are at all dog-minded, a very interesting and unusual point.

It is a well-known fact that the colour of the offspring of a union between a black and yellow labrador is always uniform; in other words, the pups are either black or yellow (never golden, please, though shades of the latter vary and there are, to be sure, chocolate and brindle variations of the breed). What would you say, therefore, if I told you that I had, just a few minutes ago, seen and handled a three-week-old labrador puppy which is a neatly patterned exception to the rule, being basically black, but with very distinctive yellow markings?

Actually I have a very good idea of your reaction. It's not pure-bred you will affirm; or, a mongrel got there first! This I will immediately counter with the news that the owners of the bitch are old hands at breeding pedigree working shooting dogs, that no cur had access to the bitch or to her forebears, and that a glance at the pedigrees of parents and preceeding generations till way, way back, will guarantee the blue blood of the strain. The sire is yellow, the dam is black, and the litter of six comprises one yellow puppy, four black and the freak, which its owners are impolite enough to call "the dachshund."

In fact the puppy is at three weeks old not unlike its namesake. Its predominant colour is black, but four yellow legs, a pair of yellow eyebrows, and a square patch of the same hue under the chin give the hound at this early stage of its career, a distinctly "dachsy" appearance. But I prefer to refer to the pup by the more distinguished title of "Mayor," on account of the wide gold chain which he wears across his chest.

This colour scheme may not be unique, but there is no doubt that it is highly unusual, as I discovered when I set off on a long trail of enquiry that has led me through a hitherto unexplored territory of biological and veterinary science. At the moment I await news from an expert of experts on the subject, but in the meantime it would be interesting to hear from any reader who may have heard of or, better still, seen a wasp coloured labrador.

An article in *The Wildfowler*, W.A.G.B.I.'s own annual magazine, by Hector Bennett, who, incidentally, is aptly christened, being a veritable Hector in the army of fowlers, reminds me of a good idea about which surprisingly few shoreshooters ever seem to bother. While waiting for flight time, Mr. Bennett often sets up a rod and line baited with lugworm, thereby sometimes supplementing his bag of duck with a flatfish or two. There are many estuaries where it would pay to copy his idea, and for the fowler living or staying on the spot, even more profitable, when the tides are right, can be the setting of a long line across the flats or in a convenient creek.

Among the swarms of holidaymakers who descend upon the beaches in summer, there is always a number of opportunists for whom the day drags. Come evening, when cold and appetite have cleared the shore, they shake off boredom and may be seen advancing seawards with coils of strong line supporting at intervals lug and/or ragworm baited hooks, which, tied at each end to stakes or stones or breakwaters, will fish throughout the tide.

But the amateur long-liner must be early astir next morning. If he is not, and the tide is out, he may find that winged or human beachcombers have helped themselves to his catch, or that his bag consists of gulls which have descended on any worms remaining and now exposed.

And if the tide is in, he may, worse still, discover that he has hooked a floundering, irate bather.

A menace to flappers on narrow waterways.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

TOWARDS the end of July gamekeepers in pre-war days used to take a cautious look along the likely streams on their ground for signs of mallard families, so that they might be able to estimate the chances of getting some modest sport either for a shooting guest or for themselves on the first of August. On our bog then I could generally discover the haunts of perhaps hâlf-a-dozen broods among the reedy waterways.

At the same time I kept a strict lookout for signs which might betray to me that some person other than myself was also interested in families of mallard. These signs were usually tracks through the green herbage on the banks of the waterways and definite foot-prints in the muddy places. When I saw marks of this sort, I knew that I would have to keep a strict watch before the season opened, and be into action as soon as the law allowed, otherwise I would get nothing. I must add that I shot most of the duck then myself.

Nowadays this survey of duck prospects in late July is of much less importance than it was in pre-war times. Even if many broods are located, the chances are that some will have gone before the season opens. One cannot watch closely for poachers during the whole of a month and more ; but in any case, strong-winged young mallard tend to leave narrow streams before September 1, which is now the statutory beginning of the open season. They become wary, and decide to spend the day on lakes and meres.

Marshland Tenants

But, when I look back upon those happy duck shooting times, I am astonished that I did not anticipate more trouble from the tenants of our marshland ; for as far as I know, there was no contract to prevent them from killing duck on their holdings in a legal fashion. Duck are not game ; so a reservation of game by the landowner would certainly have been interpreted strictly by magistrates, if I had ever been unlucky enough to take a tenant to court for shooting mallard. The truth is, I suppose, that these tenants did not bother themselves unduly to find out their sporting rights. They knew that the shooting was prosecuted by someone else, and that was the end of the matter.

A few minutes ago I had a look at the Protection of Birds Act, 1954. It seems to me that the English occupier of land has still a right to shoot mallard, unless he signs an agreement to the contrary with his proprietor ; for there is nothing to say that such an agreement would be invalid. Therefore, any owner of land with valuable duck shootings attached thereto would be well advised before the season opens to find out whether he has an exclusive right to them. It would be galling to discover too late that wildfowl which had been protected from vermin and poachers all summer by a paid keeper were being shot quite legally by a tenant.

Penalty and Costs

In England at least the tenant has a right to shoot duck, unless there is an agreement to withhold him ; but a Scottish tenant's position is not quite so clear. Section 1 of The Game (Scotland) Act, 1832, provides that any person who shall commit a trespass by entering *or being* in the daytime, upon land *without leave of the proprietor,* in search or pursuit of game, or of deer, roe, woodcocks, snipes, quails, landrails, *wild ducks,* or conies, shall, on summary conviction be liable to a penalty not exceeding £2 and the costs.

Apparently this Section of the Scottish Act, insofar as it refers to wild duck, still remains law, because there is no mention of a repeal in the Sixth Schedule of the Protection of Birds Act, 1954. Therefore a Scottish tenant would have no right to take or kill these waterfowl, unless he had express permission to do so from the landowner. This is, of course, in conformity with the idea behind the game laws of the northern country, namely, that the landowner or proprietor automatically retains the right to kill game and certain other birds when he lets the soil for agricultural purposes. In England, on the other hand, the shooting must be definitely reserved by the landowner, otherwise it passes with any other letting to the tenant.

Despite the stronger position of the Scottish landowners in this respect, it is extremely probable that most of them make doubly certain of their sporting rights by inserting the relevant clause in their agricultural agreements. Quite recently my brother-in-law who farms in Angus showed me the conditions of his lease, and I saw that one paragraph reserved every shootable creature, except ground game and vermin, to the laird.

But whatever the legal aspects of duck shooting north and south of the border may be, there can be no doubt that the later opening date, common to both countries, was designed to conserve our home-bred stocks of mallard and teal. Whether this has been achieved or not we can, at the moment, only hazard a guess. In a vermin-infested district, where flappers are sitting on narrow streams, as many duck are probably taken by predators as might have been shot in August by sportsmen, if they had the legal right to do so. During that month fox families are fending for themselves, and cubs are just as likely to harry broods of duck as anything else, particularly now, when rabbits are not numerous. [In relation to the foregoing paragraphs, see Notes and Comments in this issue. Editor].

Result of Later Season

It is true also that poachers do not miss a chance to get a few duck in August while they are still unshot by legal sportsmen. Even in the days when wildfowl shooting opened on August 1, I have known of poachers who operated in late July. On one occasion a youth was surprised in the act of stalking flappers with a powerful air rifle, and I have seen a trap baited with corn set in a bogland waterway. But the majority of poachers carried on with an ordinary 12-bore. They simply did not care who heard the shots so long as they were not caught.

Obviously, then, the later opening date for duck shooting handicaps the genuine man, and helps vermin and poachers. But I should hesitate nevertheless to advocate a return to the earlier opening date or otherwise, until a sufficient interval has elapsed to prove whether or not a legal ban on shooting in August has a markedly beneficial effect on duck stocks throughout the country. At the moment, however, I can say without fear of contradiction that mallard are, in my own district, rather scarcer now at the beginning of the season than they were in former times when they could be shot legally on August 1, although this may be partly due to the ravages of egg-eating vermin in the spring. These pests have increased greatly since keepers became less numerous here.

Another reason for the decline of mallard at the beginning of the season may be traced to a decline of hand-rearing. In pre-war times many of our wild-bred duck probably had parents which had been hatched somewhere under a barndoor fowl. We did not know this, of course ; so we wrongly assumed that the British Isles could produce as many native duck as anywhere else in the world. The truth is that we rely mainly on immigrant mallard today for the most of our shooting of this kind, and early season duck will continue, according to the numbers of vermin and poachers in one's neighbourhood, to be patchy, until hand-rearing becomes general again. Happily there is evidence that some conscientious wildfowlers are already taking practical steps in this direction.

At the same time I must admit that I have no desire to see mallard reared on a colossal scale merely to make a battue, or a series of battues, similar to the six days' shoot at Netherby in Cumberland in 1902, when 6,170 birds were killed. The best bag for one day was 1,319. It was made on November 27 ; so we must assume that these duck were at least worthy targets for anyone. After this big shoot duck rearing was discontinued on Netherby, but apparently became so fashionable elsewhere that a record bag of 2,573 was got at Kylemore, Co. Galway, on November 9, 1910. It is significant that the best bag of wild-bred duck in Britain is probably less than 200.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters and photographs are invited for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published. Correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, The Shooting Times & Country Magazine, 29 Old Bond Street, London, W.1. 'Phone: HYDe Park 2556/2557.

BUZZARDS ON DARTMOOR

Sir,—When in Devon recently I was told that the buzzard population had declined considerably since myxomatosis. However, I re-visited a lonely part of Dartmoor where two years ago I saw many pairs, and in a desolate hawthorne bush, standing by a primitive ring of stones or "hut-circles," was a buzzard's nest.

It must be a favourite spot, as there is evidence of a succession of nests built year after year. It appears that myxomatosis never really got a firm hold on the Moor.

COUNTRYMAN,
Hants.

THE CASE FOR A BRITISH REPEATER

Sir,—I have read with interest all that has been published under the above heading in recent issues.

As the letter from M. W. Stock suggests, costs and risks have to be taken into account. There are other considerations too. To compete successfully with the various forms of so-called "repeater" that are now marketed, it is believed that it would be necessary to design a gun that would be superior in some way or ways and/or be cheaper to proudce.

If it is remembered that manufacturers in some other countries have been improving their designs for about half a century, it should not be surprising that British gunmakers have no ready answer to the recent demand for similar type home-produced guns.

Parity in design and quality with the weapons in question would not be enough, because to compete with selling prices in overseas markets would necessitate mass production on a scale equivalent to that of overseas competitors. This is an important point when it is considered that a British gunmaker has to rely on overseas markets to absorb a high percentage of his output, because by comparison with most of his overseas competitors he has a very small potential home market.

It would appear that the demand in this country so far has come almost exclusively from some clay target shooters and others who have been faced with the need to replace worn out guns cheaply.

British gunmakers dislike losing this business, but so far have considered it would not warrant the expense and risk involved in producing an entirely new model.

F. J. WINFIELD,
Secretary, The Gunmakers' Association, Birmingham.

WILDFOWL TAXIDERMY

Sir,—I hope I may be permitted to comment on "Stockdove's" criticism of my recommendation of arsenical preparations for taxidermic purposes (issue July 19).

I am, of course, well aware of Montagu Browne's views on this subject (1880 *et seq.*), but since that time the publications and articles on taxidermy have been numerous, and an acquaintance with these would have served "Stockdove" well! I am personally conversant with the practice of the leading American and European taxidermists, who both as professionals and amateurs *use and recommend* arsenical preparations as the only reliable preservative.

In support of this statement readers are referred to the following authoritative works:—

(1) 1894, Davie, Oliver, *Methods in the Art of Taxidermy*, McKay, Philadelphia, U.S.A.
(2) 1921, Didier, R., Boudarel, A. (Taxidermists to the Musèum d'Histoire Naturelle de Paris), *L'Art de Taxidermie au XXeme. Siècle.* Paul Lechevalier, Paris.
(3) 1949, Eijkman, C., *Taxidermie*, A. M. Stols, 'S Gravenhage.
(4) 1956, Macdonald, J. D. (Director of the Bird Room, British Museum, Natural History, South Kensington), and Williams, J. G. (Ornithologist, Nairobi Museum), Skinning and Preserving, *The Ornithologists' Guide*, edited by Major General H. W. P. Hutson, published by The British Ornithologists' Union, London.
(5) 1957, Moyer, J. W., *Practical Taxidermy* (Staff Member of the Chicago Natural History Museum, Contributor on Taxidermy to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Encyclopedia Americana).*

It would seem therefore that what might have appeared as "exploded" in 1880, has, in actual fact, been in continuous use ever since as can be verified by reference to the above five standard text books, and there are others. As the conservator and preserver of a very large research collection both of cabinet skins and of mounted exhibits, I have good reason to use and trust to arsenic as the preservative of choice! Furthermore, the incorporation of anti-mould and anti-pest preparations is at the present time being experimented with.

JAMES M. HARRISON,
Kent.

PIGEON SHOOTING: GAME PROSPECTS

Sir,—I have read many and varied articles on pigeon shooting in your most excellent journal. Two years ago, while living at Oxford and still in the Army, during the week-ends only, I accounted for no less than 2,000 pigeon in 12 months. Almost every bird was shot over decoys in the usual manner.

There was always a larger bag made when there was a strong wind; no feathers were ever picked up, as I have always found it made no difference once a few birds were shot and put out with artificial decoys.

The best bag was made one evening in February when the pigeon were coming into a small belt of trees in a real blizzard. I could hardly see the birds for snow. A friend was with me at the time—108 birds were dropped, rather less than 100 were picked up. Shooting started about 3.30 p.m. and finished soon after 5.30 p.m. I've never seen them so thick, or had my barrels so hot. Our backs were nearly broken carrying the bag home.

Incidentally, there was no trouble disposing of pigeon. They were all shot on a long, low range of hills just a few miles east of Oxford with the very kind co-operation of all the farmers in that district, not one of them refusing permission to shoot on their ground.

A few words now on the game on this estate at present. Undoubtedly, this season has started off very well. We had a good hatch with the wild and hand-reared pheasants, the first batch going to the wood on June 26. There are some rather strong broods of wild pheasants, though very few partridges, but I am hoping they will show up better when the corn is cut.

The lonely hawthorn bush on Dartmoor where buzzards have nested several years in succession. (See letter "Buzzards on Dartmoor.")

We have our share of vermin but a continual war is waged against them. On the whole, the prospects look good.

G. WHITE (Keeper),
Norton, Glos.

PREDATORY PIKE

Sir,—"Auceps'" note on the destruction of ducklings in the July 19 issue, makes no mention of one predator which, to my knowledge, will reduce a brood considerably in next to no time—namely my old friend *Esox lucius.*

I think the Kent W.A. would be well advised to study the question of whether pike are present in their waters in any numbers—and here is the point of this letter!—if they do wish to reduce their head of pike, to give the opportunity to such fishermen as myself who will endeavour to take them by fair angling. Please don't resort to trimmers, nets, nooses and high explosives!

L.R.,
London, W.1.

MUTE SWANS—AN APPEAL TO READERS

Sir,—Those of your readers who are members of wildfowlers' associations will be aware that the Kent Wildfowlers' Association is gathering information in connection with the mute swan on behalf of The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland. This is being done because, particularly in parts of east and south-east England, the numbers have increased enormously of recent years, and reports have been made of cob swans dominating certain territories of water to such a degree that other wildfowl have been prevented from nesting in areas where they have bred for many years. Other reports of mute swans fouling farmland and causing damage to electrical supply cables have been made from time to time.

It would be of great assistance if I could receive reports giving approximate numbers of mute swans that inhabit areas in which readers are interested, and how these numbers compare with the numbers, say, 10 years ago, and if there is an increase, what effect the swan has on other wild life.

In areas where swans have increased in numbers to such an extent to constitute a problem, I would like to have opinions as to what should be done about it.

D. B. JONES (Hon. Secretary),
Donyland Cottage,
Wildernesse Avenue,
Sevenoaks, Kent.

BROWN CORVINES

Sir,—In reply to F.I.L., Nottingham (issue July 19), who asks if anyone has ever seen a brown crow in the British Isles, I, myself, have never seen a brown crow, but I have seen a brown rook.

The first one I saw, was shot here, in my village, about twenty-two years ago. Since then I have seen and heard of an odd one pretty regularly. In fact a nest containing five young brown rooks was discovered here one season. But these were killed by bird-nesting children.

We still have an adult brown rook in the area, but I have not seen it during this past three months.

In conclusion, I might add that I caught a jackdaw two years ago in a cage-trap. This bird was all brown (including its legs) with the exception of its wings and these were of natural colour.

Can anyone tell me what causes this odd colour in these birds?

COLIN DRAGE,
Abbots Ripton, Hunts.

WILDFOWLERS' DOGS

Sir,—I note there is a tendency by some people to brush aside lightly the belief of others (including myself) that the colour in dogs belonging to fowlers is of some importance. I would not sell my dog for a million pounds, but I shall never again have a black one. A yellow dog, say, can hunt out rushes for fallen duck without unduly disturbing other duck flying round; not so a black one. Also, fowlers use their dogs for rough shooting, and pigeon see and shy away far more from a black than any other dog. Experience tells!

"TOWER-BIRD,"
Sussex.

New Books

Tigermen of Anai, by Ton Schilling (Allen & Unwin, 16s.). Many years ago, when the islands of the Dutch East Indies were still full of wild and remote forests, the author lived and worked there as a surveyor and builder of roads. His diversion, during his lonely existence, was the pursuit of big game. In this book he relates not only his thrilling and possibly unique experiences when hunting tigers, crocodiles, elephants, boars, panthers, buffaloes, deer, and many other creatures. His knowledge of the jungle and of wild life is great, and it is a splendid setting well "painted" in which his hunting took place. He once witnessed a mass migration of wild pig which trampled a panther to death. He saw thousands of turtles moving across a tropic shore to be slaughtered by packs of wild dogs. He tells of the only modern "dragons" which have "escaped" into modern times.

The book, illustrated with full-page photographs, takes its title from the wide-spread legend of men who can turn themselves into tigers at will. When in human shape, they may ask a villager for shelter. But if given shelter, only the bones of the host will be found next morning, and the guest will have vanished.

This is a book of romance, and thrills, in exotic places in days long past.

The Wild and the Tame, by Huldine Beamish (Bles, 18s.). The author, when she was twenty-one became groom and general factotem to the "Old Man" on his estate in the west of England. For twenty years she stayed at her post, and this book is all about those years, and about the wide knowledge and experience she gained under the expert, if irascible "Old Man's" tuition on sport and on animals tame and wild.

But here is a book "with a difference," for it concerns a woman who learned to shoot with a single-barrelled .410, and who did much fishing; who learnt much about dogs, and who trained a number of them. It is a book which should appeal to those, especially girls who are "faced" with rather similar opportunities as Miss Beamish, who love country life and animals. It is fully illustrated by Elizabeth Gray.

The Angler's Pocket Book, by J. Wentworth Day (Evans, 6s.). No one interested in any form of field sport who reads at all can be unfamiliar with the name of Wentworth Day as the author of more than 30 books and countless articles on sport and country matters. Any book bearing his name deserves attention.

The title is fully justified, for the book slips into the pocket and the contents cover the needs of salmon, trout, coarse, sea and match anglers. The first six chapters are triumphs of condensation, for they give the *essential* facts about freshwater and sea fish and the methods of fishing for them, together with notes on baits and groundbaits, tackle preservation and recipes of various sorts for various purposes. A great deal of information is packed into these pages, but written in Mr. Day's inimitable style, it is good literature and not merely a catalogue of dos and don'ts. An impassioned attack on pollution divides the literary section from the purely practical.

The practical section contains (1) details of licences, close seasons, important by-laws, etc., for each of the English River Boards; (2) Records of Big Fish; (3) Results of the National Angling Championship from its inception to 1953 and (4) lists of angling clubs in England, Ireland, Scotland, Ulster and Wales.

In the first section it is a marvel that so much has been squeezed in. In the second it seems a pity that the results of the National Angling Championship should not have been brought to 1956; and that the method of treating English River Boards could not have been extended to the Welsh ones, which were formed under the same Act. The list of Welsh clubs is, for no apparent reason, separated from those of the other four countries—but these are very minor adverse criticisms of a thoroughly good six-shillingsworth.

The Complete Sea Angler, by Richard Arnold (Nicholas Kaye, 16s.). Mr. Arnold needs no introduction to readers of this journal as a shooting man. But he is a versatile fellow who is as at home with a fishing rod as he is with gun or rifle, and he has the happy knack of being able to pass on his wide experience to the novice easily and informally.

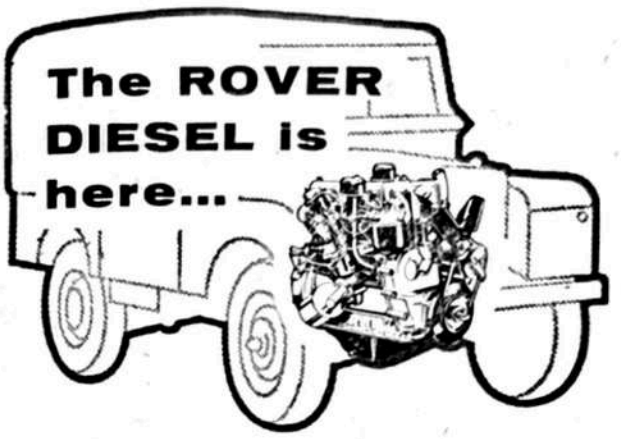
There is nothing pretentious about this book. It is basic, straightforward instruction, and as must be the case with such a work, we may feel that we have read some of it before. But Mr. Arnold is never afraid to say what he thinks and he is never content to accept theories at face value. He is also thorough and does not neglect the minor essentials of sea fishing technique, so that by and large he has given sea anglers a book that is as complete as possible at the price.

The Bull Terrier, by John F. Gordon, F.Z.S. (No. 14 Dog Lover's Library — Nicholson and Watson, 7s. 6d.). The opening chapters of this book which deal with the slow development of the bull terrier until, by 1860, Mr. Hurks produced a dog more or less as we know him now, will be of great interest to readers. (It is interesting to note that Mr. Hurks was advertising his bull terriers in *The Shooting Times* in 1885. The history of this breeding is illustrated by a kind of canine tree.

As is to be expected in a book of this type, there are most useful chapters on the good and bad points of the bull terrier, as well as breeding and feeding them. Of particular interest to owners of bull terriers will be the names, with many photographs, of past and present champions, together with personalities of the show ring. **L.R.**

Good Food From Vienna, by Susan Strong (Frederick Muller Ltd., 15s.). Cookery books always make good reading and this is no exception. The culture and civilisation of Imperial Vienna which reached its pinnacle in the 19th century embraced the culinary art no less than those of music, painting, literature, opera and the theatre. Viennese food and cooking are essentially cosmopolitan, being influenced by the city's place on the map, and mouth-watering indeed are the recipes collected by Mrs. Strong. Of course, some of the dishes are as lavish as was life in Vienna in its heyday, but very many others are inexpensively within the bounds of modern cooking.

Naturally enough we turned first to the game recipes and offer the following suggestion with regard to roast cock pheasant. In Vienna the head is kept and feathers ruffled up by a cut paper frill round the neck and the head stuck on as a garnish. In this country we are accustomed to sticking in the tail feathers before serving, but it certainly seems a shame to waste the more colourful end.



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MORE THAN 40 BRANCHES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY

Broadland Cameo

by Alan Savory

TWO centuries ago, the pool was part of the large broad, but the rotting reeds and aquatic vegetation have silted it up so that now it is but a few yards in extent, separated from the broad by a strip of feathery crested thatching reeds, where the reed warblers build their nests and sing the whole summer day through from dawn till dusk.

A dark line of alder trees backs the pool a hundred yards behind, their reflection overtopping that of the reeds by a yard or so. Giant bulrushes hold their maces in statuesque dignity from a smother of budding willow-herb. The whitethroats sing and scold in the wild rose bushes which wrestle with the convolvulus at the feet of the larch trees.

At one side of the pool a stunted willow tree leans insecurely over the water, above a clump of yellow irises. Seventy years ago a man was fishing where the irises now grow. His punt was moored to a slender willow pole, cut off short before the taper began. He was liggering for pike and his floats were pigs' bladders. He had several lines out and the bladders were floating and sailing about over the broad.

Suddenly, one of them gave a great jerk and started to tear through the water. The man wrenched at his mooring pole, but in the excitement he left it stuck in the mud.

As the water gave place to marsh the willow pole grew into a tree, its roots reaching downwards like red curved tenacles, to grasp and burrow into firmer ground. Driftwood and rubbish from the winter floods collected at its base and formed a little island. One day, the lightning cleft it so that half of it died, although the bark still lived. There was a hole in the rotten wood of the trunk and a pair of great-tits built their nest in it year after year. The hen bird was now sitting on nine white, rust-spotted eggs.

The Cuckoo

The chatter of the warblers suddenly hushed, then it broke out in an angry scolding. A cuckoo, flying like a hawk, swept over the reeds, and curving upwards alighted on the willow. The cock great-tit joined in mobbing the cuckoo and hissed and scolded in its rage. The cuckoo fluttered off the willow on to a patch of loosestrife and swallowed a hairy caterpillar, wheezing as it jerked it down its throat. A warbler flew out of the loosestrife where it had been sitting on a nest built of sedges lined with horsehair, containing five olive green eggs with a black hair line round the larger end.

A jay flew over from the larches with queer jerky wing beats, but went away without saying anything, because it had a nest in the trees and five young ones, and it did not want any one to know. The cuckoo flew back to the willow, and "cuckooing" loudly, spreads its tail against the bark. Another cuckoo flew over the reeds with something in its bill. It came away from the loosestrife with its beak empty. Then they both flew away, followed by the angry chattering of the warblers.

A cock reed-bunting, black-hooded, with a white cravat, alighted and stood erect on a blackened stem of last year's willow-herb. It swayed on its perch for a moment, then darted away to the alders where its mate had a nest, deep down in a tangle of flowering rushes and hemlock.

Through The Tunnel

A large bird suddenly appeared in the water by the yellow irises. It was about the size of a duck, only with a longer neck and a pointed beak. Two chestnut ruffs stuck out each side of its head. It was a great crested grebe and it had come to the pool from the broad by diving under the reeds and swimming along a secret tunnel which the eels used when they left the pool in the autumn and set forth on their journey down to the sea, to the grave of the Atlantic where eels go to lay their eggs, and die.

The grebe picked a red and green dragonfly off a reed-stem. The dragonfly had dwarf wings, having just emerged from its larva, which had crept up the reed after having spent a bloodthirsty session in the depths, preying on tadpoles and minute fish. The larva skin, still attached to the reed, continued to stare bleakly heavenwards.

There was a movement in the bulrushes; a bird rather bigger than a moorhen, all black but for a white, shiny forehead, swam out with puffed feathers towards the grebe. It was a coot, and had eight straw coloured eggs in a huge raft of a nest at the back of the rushes. The grebe grew smaller and smaller until only its head was above the surface, then it ducked under and was gone. The coot circled the water still puffed out for battle, and followed the chain of bubbles marking the grebe's passage until it was lost in the secret tunnel.

Down in the dark, where the muddy currents lap the pale green roots of the reeds, the grebe was suddenly flung sideways as a shoal of roach rushed by like gleams of tarnished silver before a great bronze-barred fish, long and slim, with wicked jaws armed with teeth which hooked backwards. For fifty years the pike had lived in the broad, feeding on the eels and roach. Sometimes it would swim under a brood of young duck, dragging them under one by one. There was a white streak running the full length of its protruding lower jaw.

A Gleaming Silver Fish

One day, when the reeds were talking in husky whispers, nodding their plumed heads together in the snow-dusted wind, a gleaming silver fish with a scarlet tail had darted away in front of the pike. A triangle of barbed hooks were hidden in the tassle; they had stuck in the pike's jaws. A sunken log had parted the trace. That night, a man told the locals in the village inn of the gigantic fish which had taken his spoon-bait. The pike had rubbed the hooks out against the log, but the scar remained.

The roach dashed out of the tunnel and left the water in a glittering shower, to fall amongst the kingcups on the bank, where they were found by an otter half-an-hour later. The pike swirled round the pool in search of them; suddenly it seized the coot by the feet and dragged it under. The water bubbled, the marsh-gas rose in great upheavals of mud. A few blackish-grey feathers floated amongst the bubbles. The coot was too big for the pike to swallow; presently it broke the surface and floated, a mass of draggled feathers, the water underneath it changing from brown to dusky red.

A heron cried harshly as it beat with languid strokes across the sky, and the bulrushes shivered in the encircling ripples.

The broadland pool, once part of a large broad.

The Changing Scene

(Continued from page 600)

along the miles of foreshore. When the tide is out, he is faced with great stretches of mud, some of it dangerous, and great stretches of sand, some of it not as hard as it looks, though much of it "good walking."

Yet, as I never have (and never will) trust a bull, so with the shifting scene of coastal waters. You should never really trust the mud and the sand too far, or for too long. Like the general scene, they shift and change, and I could take you over muddy places today where a year or so ago you would have sunk almost out of sight. Likewise, I could take you to places where, two years since, you could have walked over in safety, but where you would now flounder and sink. There are "sand-holes" (quick-sands, if you like) into which you can step after walking for hundreds of yards over a hard surface. There is no, or little difference, in the "look" of the hard and the soft sand. One moment you may be walking gaily along towards your chosen spot; the next you may be up to your knees in sand with no seeming substance to it, and rapidly sinking deeper.

Wildfowlers, particularly tyros, should never lose sight of these facts, and should never be over-confident when crossing muds, saltings, and stretches of sand; or when stepping, or sliding down the banks of channels and gutters, for here, frequently, the look of the surface is deceptive, and firm going at one spot does not mean that the ground may be firm at the next.

On several occasions I have found myself temporarily stuck in deep, sucking mud at the bottom of a gutter, and have often thought how a broken leg or ankle would hold one there, well below the surface of the ground, what time a making tide came—first trickling, then swirling, and finally racing down it.

Observe the position of each shot on the target.

GROUPS AND GROUPING

by Richard Arnold

THOUGH the club rifleman may find something of interest, perhaps even to his benefit, in this article, the following notes are addressed chiefly to the novice, and to the field shooter. With a few exceptions, the average sportsman who uses a rifle in the field does not do anything like the amount of practice which his counterpart in the rifle club does. Furthermore he is frequently handicapped by lack of sufficient ammunition allowed him on his firearms certificate to carry out the practice he should and, in consequence, he husbands his allowance for practical shooting in the field.

Very few .22 sporting rifles will shoot as accurately as the target rifle; first because of their lower weight which allows more "wobble" or barrel deviation through movements of the shooter, and secondly because the barrels are subject to great barrel vibrations or flip.

Nonetheless, excellent results are obtained by these weapons used properly, in the right hands, and at the proper ranges. However, it is a little perplexing at times to hear sporting shooters proudly proclaim that their weapon is capable of giving a group so small, so definite, that at upwards of 30 yards the whole string of shots will centre inside a sixpence. When one hears such things, unless the weapons concerned are subjected to a practical test, the immediate reaction is: why don't the manufacturers concentrate on this one wonderful model to the exclusion of all others? In actual fact, of course, these wonderful groups and grouping potentialities are bracketed with the extremely long ranges carried out by superbly hard hitting weapons wielded by certain members of the shotgun fraternity. In other words, the statements are made rather loosely, combined with the dickens of a lot of wishful thinking. Added, of course, to the fact that the true meaning of the word "group" is not entirely understood by the sportsman concerned.

Almost Perfect At Short Range

At ranges of 25 yards it may be stated without contradiction that the best rifles and .22 ammunition are almost perfect, and even should the shooter aim a little imperfectly a bull should not be impossible. But before going into the implications of this statement one has to consider what the standard grouping is. So far as target shooting is concerned the target is so designed that, allowing for angular deviation of the cone of fire within certain definite limits, a possible at 25 yards would also be a possible at both 50 yards and 100 yards. Theoretically, assuming wind and weather and ballistic conditions of rifle and ammunition to be constant and perfect, it should be equally as easy to score a possible at the longer ranges as at the 25 yards range. In practice, of course, theory is routed and an analysis of shooting scores and records will reveal that the greatest number of possibles are scored at 25 yards, and equally so a greater number at 50 yards than at 100 yards.

Minutes of Angle

The permissible angular deviation of the cone of fire is slightly over one minute of angle from the centre of the cone. For the non-technical a minute of angle may be defined as that subtended by a deviation of one inch at 100 yards, and coupled with this should be the additional deviation of half the diameter of the .22 bullet, thereby introducing what is known as the allowable deviation.

Thus, when a manufacturer claims that his products group in a 2in. or 1½in. ring, he is claiming that the weapon (using a certain type of ammunition) will place ten consecutive shots in a group which may be circumscribed by a ring of 2in. or 1½in. diameter.

This "group" claiming by a manufacturer points to a most important factor in rifle shooting, a factor which must be thoroughly assimilated and understood by the rifleman. This factor is that the rifle will not place every shot inside the same bullet hole on the target, as some sportsmen believe, but that the accuracy of the rifle, and the correctness of it centres upon its groupings. In other words, the rifleman must everlastingly think in terms of groups, and never consider the effect of single shots.

Unfortunately Services training is sometimes at fault here. It is common practice, or was, in the Services for a soldier to be taken on to the range, after basic instruction had been given, and instructed to fire at certain targets at fixed ranges. One shot is generally allowed "to clear the barrel" of oil, or as a "sighter" and thereafter the recruit is expected to go on and score for the bull. This is wrong—utterly wrong, because the unfortunate shooter, and this happens also in civilian life to those sporting shooters who have not had the benefit of club experience or other tutorial benefits—aims and observes the effect of his shot. If he hits the bull, probably by a fluke, confusion ensues because he takes the same aim and, not being group conscious, is dismayed to find his bullet hole either off the bull, or in a different position from where he thought he had fired. He could have been centring his shots with the extreme left hand or right hand shot of the group in the bull; the net result is that the circle or group would have its centre off the bull.

Magnifying the Errors

Should he find his shot, say, high and to the left, again having no knowledge of groups, he corrects his aim, lower and to the right—with again, dire consequences. And so he goes on and on, chasing his errors, magnifying them, and coming to the conclusion that the weapon he is using is useless or arriving at the same conclusion as his officer or N.C.O. in charge that he could not hit a barn door at five paces.

It is utterly and absolutely impossible to centre your group by firing single shots and then adjusting either sights or aim because *nothing*, positively *nothing*, can alter the potential grouping of a series of shots from a given weapon. Mind you, the grouping of a rifle may vary with different brands, or even batches, of ammunition: the condition of the barrels, wear, fouling, and so forth, will also affect the grouping.

The first thing to do with your rifle is to find how it groups. Unless you do this you are only wasting your own time and your money. Having made your aim on the target and noted where the first shot went, do not adjust your aim or sights. Fire another shot and observe its position on the target. And so on until you have fired at least ten shots. Assuming your sights to be correct for range, it may be that the resulting ten holes in the target are 1½ to the right of the bull and 1in. above it, so far as the centre of the group is concerned. The whole of the shots should be within the guaranteed circle at 100 yards.

Still without adjusting the sights or aim, fire a second string of ten shots, and observe the position and grouping of the bullet holes on another target at the same range. Identical grouping, providing there have been no imperfections in aim, should have resulted.

Now find the centre of the group. Technically this is termed finding the mean radius. There is nothing difficult about it. Draw a vertical line on one side of the group and ascertain the average distance of this line from the centre of the bullet holes. Draw another vertical line at this distance from the first one and it will be seen that the centre of the group is cut by this line. Now draw a horizontal line at the correct distance with the centre of the group lying on it. The intersection of the horizontal and vertical line will show the true centre of the group. To ascertain the mean radius the distances of the centres of the bullet holes to the centre of the

(Continued on page 615, col. 3)

Ducks, Dukes and Others

by S. V. N. C.

DURING the past year at least two contributors to this journal have commented on the fine fowling possibilities afforded by the lake in the Park. I vaguely remembered reading an account of a certain royal personage who enjoyed this privilege, so turning to my library I tried to trace the source of the story. After a time I almost forgot the original object of my quest; so many other noteworthy and memorable stories presented themselves. Thornton and Hawker figured largely of course and all the more famous shooting men of bygone days, but some of the more interesting and enjoyable stories were of people one does not usually think of in connection with field sports. After a long and rather dusty search I found the story I was looking for in the Diary of R. D. Blumenfeld. His account reads:

"Maude Garland, the statuesque Juno who used to stir the hearts of our young Guardsmen at the Gaiety, had a bad fall in the Park this morning, and was taken to St. George's Hospital severely bruised. She was ambling along the Row when there was an unexpected fusillade of shots, which sent her hired hack skeltering and displaying unwonted alacrity like a buck-jumper, and she came down in a heap. It seems that 'George Ranger' (The Duke of Cambridge) who is the autocrat of the Park, has decreed that there are too many wild ducks, which are corrupting the manners of the tame ones, and so every morning he organises a battue. The result is recorded across the way at St. George's where the equestrian casualties are deposited. Someone suggested to the Duke yesterday that the ducks might more easily be snared. His reply, as usual, was vigorous."

A Dreaded Thought Today

And this happened a mere fifty years ago; one hardly dares think of the reaction of the "Anti-Bodies" if the duck (and of course, the equestrians) were subjected to this sort of treatment today.

Most of the other anecdotes I came across in my search for the above episode are too well known to bear repeating but some I found in a small book published in 1804 concerning lesser known characters are quite amusing.

The Prince Regent is not usually associated in peoples' minds with shooting, but when resident at Clifden House in Buckinghamshire he gave orders for "breeding a great number of pheasants and partridges, that when they came to proper maturity they might be liberated on purpose to afford His Royal Highness amusement in the shooting season." It so happened that the local parson, by name, Bracegirdle, was an extremely keen shot and not above poaching. This the Prince was aware of and he therefore sent the parson "an express command to him not to molest the game, for that he would, in due time, consider him and his family."

The first season the command was obeyed, but the next season, the parson, unable any longer to resist the temptation sallied forth with his gun under his arm. Unfortunately for him he met the Prince who was also shooting that day, and he was requested to turn out the contents of his gamebag. This was done, and the contents, a brace of partridges and a cock pheasant were laid before the Prince. The parson, falling on his knees, apologised most abjectly and "besought His Royal Highness's forgiveness, alleging, that the beauty of the morning invited him abroad, and happening to take his gun along with him, the creatures getting up before him, flesh and blood could not forbear."

The Prince accepted Bracegirdle's apology, and being rather taken with him used thereafter to invite him shooting, and took lessons from him "on the art of shooting flying, in which the Prince was at time defective." In return for these lessons and a further promise not to disturb the Royal Preserves the parson was granted the living of Taplow, then worth, we were told, £200.

An Anonymous Nawab

Another story from the same source records the exploits of an anonymous Nawab. He set out from Lucknow for a hunting trip of four months' duration with a retinue of 40,000 men, 1,500 elephants, numberless horses, camels and bullocks, 150 pieces of canon, and "Tygers, leopards, hawks, fighting cocks, dancing girls, buffoons and mountebankes." (One cannot help but feel that this is a trifle excessive, even for a four month shooting trip). "Above 500 coolees carried his shooting apparatus, guns, powder, shot, and etceteras; he had over 1,000 double barreled guns, the finest that Manton and Nock could make, and single barrels without number."

After relating one or two minor incidents that occurred on the trip the author describes an elephant hunt, at the conclusion of which he observes: "There were above 13,000 shots fired from all directions: and, considering the confusion, I am surprised that the scene was not more bloody on our side, only about twenty men being killed or maimed and near half-a-dozen of horses."

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Bullet Splash

by David Stone

THIS is undeniably the most frustrating time of the year for small-bore shooters. There are so many other things demanding his time. There are the allotment, the garden; the redecorating that the wife has been trying to get him to do since last summer; there are of course, the summer holidays to save up for and all these things sometimes make it extremely difficult to keep on shooting, especially with nothing competitive going on at our club.

If we are to shoot during the summer months, there is no doubt that the majority of us would very much like to get outside and "have a go." Unfortunately, the amenities available to most, deny us this and so we must sweat it out in our generally ill-ventilated indoor ranges. But we can at least talk about what we would like to do and also what we have done in the past "outside."

It seems that most of the achievements of our members in the open were accomplished during their time in the Services, and when the conversation turns, somewhat nostalgically, back to those Service rifle meetings, old Bob Crackett will, without fail, recall a certain meeting held in Germany after the last war.

Can It Be Seen

Only an evening or two ago, over our cup of tea, the conversation did turn to those days, and progressed through devious channels, to an argument concerning whether or not it is possible actually to see a .303 bullet going up the range at a speed, or velocity, of something like — indeed a little more than — two thousand feet per second?

I argued that it is possible, simply because I am convinced that I can see them, given the right atmospheric conditions. I have been able to since my apprentice days. In charge of the testing range where I did my training, was an oldish chap whose name I have forgotten, but whose character and prowess with any sort of weapon I shall never forget. He was some sixty years of age at the time, but I can see him even now, in shirt sleeves and with greasy, battered old trilby hat tilted over his eyes, .45 calibre Webley in hand, and putting the six shots into a group that you could almost cover with a penny. He patiently persevered with me until he was certain that I could see the streak of the shot going up the range.

Direction and Elevation

By seeing it, I do not mean that I can see the small, glistening shape of it spinning furiously through its trajectory from the muzzle until it penetrates the target—although some do claim that they can see the splash of it striking the target as well. Personally I cannot do that, but I can quite distinctly pick up the dark smudge of it some way from the muzzle and follow it clearly until almost reaching the target.

I am certain enough of direction, but most uncertain of its exact elevation (Bob Crackett will vouch for that!). In fact, my estimation of elevation was the direct cause of old Bob losing the Bren Gun Individual honours at the rifle meeting already mentioned! I was his No. 2 on the gun when he fired his snap practice and success in that would have given him top place. I could see his shots, perfect for direction every one and to me perfect also for elevation but obviously they were not—I tapped him on the shoulder to signify "spot on"—but it turned out that they were just over the top.

However, Bob never complained and took his failure, or perhaps I should say my failure, in good part.

Apart from those in our club, I wonder if there are others, elsewhere, who also doubt the capability of the human eye to see a .303 inch bullet on its way to the target?

Are there some perhaps, who agree with me?

Clay Pigeon Shooting Fixtures

Aug. 2: Childrey C.P.S.C., The Plough, Little Coxwell, Faringdon, Berks. Club Shoot. 6 p.m.
Aug. 3: Hampshire Skeet Championship, Boldre and District G.C., nr. Lymington.
Aug. 4: Harrogate G.C., Yorks. Members Shoot. 1.45 p.m.
Aug. 5: Co. Durham D.T.L. Championship, Hamsterley, nr. Bishop Auckland. 1 p.m.
August 5: Wetherby and District G.C. West Riding Championships. Open.
Aug. 5: Waltham Abbey G.C. Members' Shoot, Essex. 2 p.m.
Aug. 6: Bedford and District G.C., Elstow. Crissell Cup event.
Aug. 7: Billingsley and Chorley G.C., Shropshire. Practice Shoot. 6.30 p.m.
Aug. 7: Pocklington G.C., York. Open Shoot and Ferguson Cup (members only). 6 p.m.
Aug. 10: Nottinghamshire D. T. L. Championship, Cavendish G.C., Forest Town. 2.30 p.m.
Aug. 10: Capt. Wright Memorial Cup, Strangford Lough Wildfowlers' Association, Ulster C.P.S.A.

(Reports and results appear on next page)

GUN GOSSIP

by North Country

A LETTER from Headquarters, Northern Army Group, will be of interest to keepers and potential keepers as well as ordinary shooting men, because the writer of it is due to assume a position as a trainee-keeper when he is released from the Army next February. He is Corp. L. W. Liggett and he seeks my advice on one or two little points. I will do my best to help in any way I can.

As with many of us today, this correspondent writes that his financial position is rather limited and he therefore is unable to purchase a double, but he intends to acquire a single barrel, of well-known make. He explains: "My problem is with reference to choking. What would you recommend as a good all-round choke for a would-be keeper in my position. I know there is really no perfect all-round gun, but there must be something near enough to it to make little or no difference. Secondly, what type of 'shells' do you recommend a keeper to load his pockets with when patrolling his preserves and also for what purpose would a keeper use the actual 'shells' you recommend."

These singles may of course be had in any boring. The most popular, I should say, is half or modified choke, and I rather feel that this would be the most suitable boring for my correspondent. Full choke is all very well, even in a single. But a keeper is obliged to take many snap-shots at vermin (which may be at close range) and I scarcely think that he is helping himself by having full choke (unless he happens to be an altogether *exceptional* shot). While he needs all the range he can *usefully* get, he is sure to experience a lot of snap-shooting at magpies, jays, etc. At this time ranges may be very close (in the fullness of summer) and a full choke might add to the difficulties of being on target.

A keeper does, in my opinion, want some range in his gun. Most of his shooting will be at birds flying from him rather than at birds driven towards him. He will, too, need to take many a sitting shot — at vermin or pigeon. Crows, pigeon and sparrowhawks soon learn the range of a shotgun and are clever at maintaining a safe or nearly safe distance. So if only one barrel or boring is available, it needs to be something of a compromise. While the keeper requires to snap a jay flitting between the trees or a rat or stoat in some bank, he also needs to be able to "polish off" birds in the open at 45 yards. A well-bored half choke (in other words a barrel which should put 60 per cent of its shot charge in the 30in. circle at 40 yards) would seem to be the answer.

Where a bit extra killing range is needed, it is a good thing to remember that the "Maximum" cartridge is always available for 2¼in. chambered guns. It costs a little more, but it is loaded with the generous charge of 1-3/16oz. of shot — nearly that of a 2¾in. case. I think a keeper should always have a few of these cartridges in reserve. As regards shot sizes, Nos. 5 and 6 are likely to be as suitable as possible for the general work of a keeper. I suggest the standard cartridge thus loaded.

A Sturdy Action

My correspondent then asks me about the action of the gun he proposes to buy. He writes: "I have never actually handled one of these guns (my shotgun experience being limited to automatic and pump guns, with sawed-off barrels and loaded with buckshot; I was a railroad guard in the U.S.A. for two years). But I do like the looks of this weapon, also it is within the limits of my finances, but I'm a little bit doubtful as to how much rough handling such a loading action will take. After all a keeper would really encumber himself if he possessed a weapon that needed the gentle care of, say, a .22 target rifle. I am a gun lover, I even treat my service rifle as if it were a baby."

Well, I do know this action and I can assure my correspondent that it is a very strong action indeed and one which is well able to stand up to a great amount of the hardest wear and tear. It is, in my opinion, just the thing for the kind of experience he anticipates. No doubt the makers foresaw all this and wisely went forward on their project. All things considered, I feel that this would be a wise choice.

I was very glad to hear again from Mr. H. N. Anderson the other day who, as I expect most readers will recall, lives in that far-famed spot, Santa Rosa, California. In the early weeks of the year when I hear details of the almost delightful weather over there I feel what a fortunate man is Mr. Anderson! It is different just now, as I write this on a perfect day of summer.

First of all I must thank my correspondent for the book and magazines about trap and skeet shooting—it is indeed kind and thoughtful of him. These will, in due course, be passed on for others to see. Readers may remember that Mr. Anderson took up trap shooting again and did very well—in fact he shot up to his best standard. Now he writes: "I have got into a slump in my shooting, and cannot figure out what is wrong. When I started trap shooting again after nearly thirty years lay-off, I broke enough 23s and 24s out of 25 to keep me interested. Now I have fallen as low as 20 at times. A new wingmaster trap gun arrived yesterday from the Remington factory and I am most anxious to try it out as it is nearly a half pound lighter than my mod. 12 Winchester trap. I enjoy your articles very much and look forward to receiving *The Shooting Times* from my good friend in Hunstanton. With such fast plane service on B.O.A.C. between San Francisco and London, I sure would like to pay your country a visit one of these days—less than a day, isn't that remarkable!"

Temporary Lapse

As regards this last, I am sure we should be delighted to see Mr. Anderson—at any time he might be able to come. I hope he will let us know, should he decide upon the trip. Going back to question of shooting, I expect the slump is but temporary. We all experience much the same sort of thing from time to time. I don't know about the climate—but heat effects most people (and their shooting). The lighter gun might be an answer. Indeed I would never be surprised to hear that this is so.

Mr. Anderson must be—basically—a very sound shot. What I always feel about all these things—you either have it in you or you have not got it in you. The instructor, the schoolmaster, whoever he may be, may come along, and help you to develop what is already there. But he cannot give you what is not there. And he has no right to arrogate to himself the credit for having *made* you. He then is fortunate who has inherited a natural aptitude for shooting. With sufficient and suitable practice he can reach the top.

I have a letter from a man who writes: "What makes grouse shooting so difficult?" I was almost on the point of saying that I did not know it was so difficult. But of course it is not correct to put out any statement of this kind. A fair comment to make is that, all things taken into account, grouse are much the same as partridges etc. (whether walked-up or driven). I would say that grouse are a trifle faster. But I think that shooting from the butt is more favourable (to the shooter) than from a hurdle or a hedge. A butt also gives a certain extra sense of security and assurance, and in my opinion far superior cover. Partridges swerve more in their flight and are perhaps a little more deceptive and difficult. At least I feel that way about them.

If grouse are really difficult it is usually when they come (as they sometimes do) flat out and round the shoulder of a hill. That is when scoring averages and so on go to pieces. But straightforward, shall I say conventional grouse whether walked or driven are not *specially* difficult. And the ordinary mortal of modest capabilities should soon feel at home. Later in the season, when many shooters are back in their offices, or at their clubs (or perhaps busy shooting partridges) is the time when the red bird calls for the greatest skill. Late September and early October on the moors may provide days never to be forgotten.

If grouse come nicely forward on a fine still day—say about the end of August—I consider them to be reasonable targets. If you are out for averages and figures (I'm sure you're not), that would be a good time for you. But you know, moors differ a lot. Some render shooting more difficult than others. Some comparatively flat moore, I am sure, are in favour of the shooter. Grouse on a Connemara mountain may behave differently from those in Yorkshire.

Clay Pigeon Shooting

(The C.P.S. Fixture List is on facing page)

Reports and Results

Blackpool Gun Club held a shoot on July 6 for the Thos. Bamber Skeet Cup and Lancashire Skeet Championship. Results: T. E. Sanders, 37 + 4 = 41; G. Jones, 35 + 4 = 39; F. Garlick, 34 + 4 = 38; W. Heald, 33 + 4 = 37; J. Sanders, 29 + 8 = 37. The two latter divided.

Lancashire County Skeet Championship shield and medal: F. Garlick, 34 ex 40. Lancashire County Skeet Championship novice tankard: J. Sanders, 29 ex 40.

1. 25 Down-the-Line events: Class A: W. Heald, 50 ex 50; A. Heald, 48 ex 50. Class B: P. Wetton, 44 ex 50, divided with O. Hart, 44 ex 50.

2. 25 Down-the-Line Points: Class A: W. Heald, 47 ex 50; A. Heald, 46 ex 50.

3. 25 Down-the-Line Points: Class A: R. Braithwaite, 47 ex 50; D. Kippax, 45 ex 50.

4. 25 Down-the-Line Points: Class A: D. Kippax, 47 ex 50; R. Braithwaite, 44 ex 50.

5. 25 Down-the-Line Points: Class A: D. Kippax, 50 ex 50; A. Heald, 43 ex 50; R. Braithwaite, 44 ex 50.

but just failed by one bird. W. Heald was high gun scratch for F. Garlick Cup over 3 events.

D. Kippax tried a further 25 to make it a 75 day, Sporting, D.T.L. and Skeet, with 115 ex 130 points, followed by F. Garlick 110, S. Entwistle with 89.

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Twenty-three guns took part in the **Hayfield Gun Club's** Open Shoot held at the Little Mill Inn, Rowarth, on July 6. The weather was very close and warm, and gun barrels became almost too hot to hold, until in the evening there was some welcome rain.

A programme of seven events was fired, with two prizes in each event, and after various shoot-offs at 5 Down-the-Line, the final results were: 5 pairs partridges, S. B. Wilson and A. M. Toms; 5 singles and 5 pairs pheasants, A. M. Toms and M. Fleetwood; 5 single grouse, R. J. Padfield and M. Fleetwood; 10 walking-up, C. Wilson and R. J. Padfield; 5 single and 5 pairs crossing, R. J. Padfield and M. Fleetwood; 10 woodcock, A. M. Toms and S. Bagshaw; 5 pairs Skeet, J. Watson and V. Harrison.

An aggregate prize over the seven events was won by A. M. Toms. The shooting ground was used by kind permission of Mr. C. Wilson, who welcomed the company during the evening, in the Little Mill.

Fisherman's Diary

by Coridon

AUGUST has been described as the month in which the greatest number of anglers catches the smallest number of fish. Unfortunately there is the substratum of truth usual in such sayings, and this is not entirely due to the fact that a higher percentage of completely inexperienced people are wielding rods than at any other time.

It cannot be gainsaid, of course, that in August many thousands of men, women and children fish for the only time in the year, and that a considerable number fish for the first time. Perhaps the greatest proportionate increase is among sea anglers, but all branches of the sport—salmon, trout, coarse and match fishing—are likely to be affected.

The reasons are clear enough. August is the holiday month. Thousands whose tackle lies neglected through the year hasten to restore it to some sort of condition ready for an enthusiastic, but often inexpert bash at whichever fish of river, canal, lake or sea strikes their fancy. Children of school age (and thus of fishing age) are free for some happy weeks. Several of them are experienced anglers who can (and do) teach their elders some lessons, but the majority simply add to the number of fishless fishermen.

A far greater number of men than one suspects are anglers only in thought for fifty weeks of the year. They read about angling and daydream about it, but for various reasons —family commitments, location of home, or lack of drive—they only practise it during the annual holiday.

I know at least two men (as genuinely interested in fishing as any among my acquaintances) who take no pleasure in a day's or even a week-end's fishing. They need time—at least five consecutive days on the same water—in order to extract from angling the particular essence that gives them enjoyment. There are, also, many highly skilled salmon and trout fishermen holding high positions in professions, politics or industry who literally cannot spend more than a few days a year at the waterside. These last two groups, containing skilful but infrequent anglers, are more likely to increase the number of fish caught than to be a handicap.

August's bad reputation is, however, based on firmer ground than inefficient anglers. Specimen fish are simply not caught in large numbers in that month. It seems that fish experience dog-days, become stale, disinterested in food, and may, like the humans who seek them, be themselves in need of a holiday.

My own August choice is deep fresh water —a reservoir for trout and a lake or pit with at least 20ft. of water for coarse fish.

Rudd Fishing

The deep lake suits me for August fishing, but if I lived in really good rudd country that species would tempt me often to waters I now leave unfished until September. Unfortunately the rudd are not there.

I have a great regard for rudd. They fill so many niches in that hall of memory that each of us possesses. I have never caught a really big one, but they have often saved the day, and the rudd days were always fine summer ones, with memories of beautifully coloured fish admired for a moment as they shone in the glow of a descending sun before being replaced in the water where they could grow bigger and retain those brilliant colours that fade so quickly after death.

Providing the angler is stealthy in approach, light-handed with his tackle, and capable of casting accurately to the very edge of distant weed-beds, rudd will provide sport on those windless sun-baked days when all angling seems hopeless and the float remains idle as the painted ship. Rudd like feeding just under the surface in such conditions, and a maggot, a small red worm or a piece of paste fished less than a foot below a match-sized float will often catch them. A dry fly is worth a trial, and, if a little ripple comes to disturb the surface, a wet one is almost sure to succeed.

Ties for Anglers

Some months ago I suggested that artificial flies, with their endless combination of size, colour and pattern, might make a good motif for tie makers. I do not suppose that my words influenced any manufacturers, but be that as it may, there have appeared on the market some very attractive ties in a choice of background colours decorated with artificial flies. They look good, and I imagine they will appeal to many people who think a B.W.O. is something advertisers in women's magazines are discreet about.

Several clubs have their own ties and the A.C.A.'s leaping fish is well known, but until now the off-duty angler has been sartorially neglected.

I don't at the moment see a tie for the coarse fish angler. I could produce a most attractive pattern based on floats, but its appeal might well be limited, while ties featuring groups of rampant maggots (dye them how you will) or intertwined lobworms could be worn only by motherless anglers, unmarried and unengaged.

I am, of course, writing of normal, conventional, chastely and minutely adorned British ties. If any angler wants to go all American he can wear a full-picture tie depicting a fisherman spinning in the Loopahannanook, a man holding a half a hundredweight of channel bass on a string, or a nymph with even less dressing than a north-country tyer would allow her.

Manatees

Manatees, sea-cows, dugongs—not exactly the same creatures, perhaps, but near enough to make no difference—have attracted me ever since the distant day when someone first read to me the seal story from the Jungle Books.

Through the years I have collected a good many facts and a great deal of lore about them, and I was delighted to see a pair re-established in the London Zoo aquarium. I was glad to see, too, that in their descriptive panel the Zoo authorities repeat the mermaid legend. From a score of curious items I choose the following :

"In Mauritius there is a fish called the Man-atee, which used both elements; its fins serve for stilts at land as they do for oars at sea. It delights at beholding a man's face, and is valuable for a stone found in the head, which being pounded and drank in wine, fasting, cures the cholick."

I cannot honestly say that I saw delight in the countenance of either male or female when they saw me in the Zoo.

Salmon Nets

Friction between salmon netsmen and salmon anglers is common enough. It is not so usual for salmon netsmen to complain about other netsmen. The whole-time professional fishermen of the Tamar complain that more licences for net fishing (at £15) have been issued this season than ever before, and that so many "part-timers" clutter up the waterway that the professionals can make no more than six casts a tide.

A Cornwall River Board spokesman is reported to have said: "With the right of fishing in tidal waters open to anyone who cares to take out a licence you just cannot stop them. They are as much entitled to have a go as anyone else."

I cannot at this time refer to the regulations of all the River Boards, but I am sure that some have powers to limit the number of net licences they issue. I may be wrong, and perhaps anyone anywhere can get a licence for tidal waters if he pays his money.

With the price of salmon as it is about 30lb. of salmon brings in £10, and one lucky tide can pay for the licence. This must sound an attractive source of extra income to those who earn their ordinary livelihood in other ways and have time to fish fairly regularly.

One of those windless, sun-baked days.

Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

WILDFOWLERS continue to show interest in the recent discussion on wildfowlers' dogs. So far the letters that I have received are pretty evenly divided between those which insist that the dog should be steady and those who consider running in to fall is a great advantage. Quite a number of readers emphasise the importance of colour, and stress that spaniels which show a lot of white can be a nuisance on the marsh, as also can very light coloured retrievers. Quite frankly, as regards this colour question, I think that fowlers are apt to get it out of proportion. The great thing on the marsh when waiting for the flight is absolute stillness on the part of man and dog. Birds are quick to notice the slightest movement on the ground, and I believe that more shots are lost due to restlessness by shooter and/or his dog than by lack of camouflage. After all, duck are quite used to seeing cattle of broken colour on the marshes and I cannot imagine that a patch of colour is going to deter them if it is not moving about in a suspicious manner.

Reader A.A.C. (Alnwick) writes a letter typical of many that I have received: "I am a keen wildower, indulging in a little pigeon shooting and 'clay bashing' during the summer months. The labrador bitch that I have was purposely chosen for her colour. She is bred from working, but not fashionable parents, and has some, but by no means all, of the qualities that I would like in an ideal wildfowler's dog. I have no time for the dogless wildfowler — he is usually a selfish person, too selfish to save and buy himself a dog and who expects anyone within shouting distance to bring over his dog and retrieve his fallen birds for him. I took a spare-time job to enable me to buy my dog and a good gun —anyone else can do the same if he desires.

Courage, Colour and Hardiness

"The qualities I would like in my ideal dog are as follows, but not necessarily in the order given. Courage: I know a dull dog will learn given time, but it may be drowned before it learns to swim with a fast running ebb tide in an estuary, and land maybe a quarter of a mile away, rather than to try to swim against the tide back to its master. This is only one example of what I mean. Colour: Black and cream labs, retrievers and spaniels can all be seen a good distance away and have to be covered with some material. This can hinder a dog from marking the fall of a bird. My own dog is light brown. (I expect my correspondent means light chocolate.—P.R.A.M.) Hardiness: They *must* be hardy, able to withstand the cold even after a retrieve from water on a very cold day. Silence: No whimpering at the sight of wildfowl feeding a hundred yards away or flying close. Last, but by no means least, the wildfowler's dog should be a one-man animal.

"Running-in to fall is an advantage underestimated unless you happen to possess a dog with this 'fault.' I do, and I know that I have got duck which I would have lost had Bess not been half-way there when the birds hit the water. That is all I can think of—no doubt you will have many letters from wildfowlers all over the country, but if any small item in my letter is of general interest, it will have achieved its object and I shall be happy . . ."

Proof of the Pudding . . .

My correspondent hits the nail on the head when he states that it is easy to underestimate the advantages of running-in to fall unless you happen to own a dog with this "fault." The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and though I know a lot of shooters profess to like a dog which "runs-in" simply because they are not able to prevent theirs from so doing, I am sure the average wildfowler really does find it an advantage. The great point, which I have already stressed, but which I emphasise again, is that we are not considering the dog which runs in every time the gun is fired, but the intelligent animal which learns, or has been trained, to be off to retrieve directly a bird is hit. In other words, it waits to make sure that a hit has been registered—whether by sight, sound or some second sense I do not know or care.

Most bitches can feed their pups up to the age of eight weeks.

The question of courage is an important one as well. Certainly no dog is of any use to the wildfowler unless it has plenty of that. However, a warning is necessary here. There are plenty of dogs which start their working life nervy and highly strung, but which, with experience, become as bold as brass when at work, even though they may retain their timidity at other times. As to the dog which will take advantage of currents and tide—to say nothing of wind direction—this is, surely, much more a matter of intelligence and sagacity than courage. Certainly no dog intended for wildfowling should be put into strong currents or heavy seas until it has had practice, graduated to suit progress, in calmer waters such as ponds, dykes and streams, or calm seas. Suddenly to plunge a dog into heavy swell or swift-flowing currents, without previous experience, and expect it to do anything except panic, is asking too much of all but the most exceptional animal.

A point which has not so far been raised in this discussion on wildfowling dogs is the question of directing a dog *on water*, by signals and command. American retriever people, and trial men in particular, pay very great attention to working their dogs over vast stretches of water on blind retrieves, purely by signal. Indeed, most retriever field trials in the U.S.A. are supreme water tests. It must be borne in mind that the average bird shooter over there prefers to use a pointer or setter, or even a spaniel, whereas retrievers are almost exclusively water dogs and are, in the main, in the hands of duck-hunters, who find them essential. On that vast continent there are great stretches of water, and for every man who can indulge in "upland game" shooting there are probably ten or more whose only shooting will be at wildfowl. Therefore good retrievers are a *sine qua non*, and dogs which will handle on water are in great demand.

One of the reasons why the accent in recent years at retriever trials over here has been on handling has been the American market and, as it has been explained to me, you cannot expect to be able to handle a dog in water by signal if it has not been used to directions on land. The American system of retriever training, therefore, puts great emphasis on working a dog by hand signal at first on land, training it to such a pitch that it can ultimately be handled equally as well in water. We all know how different it is to get a dog to go in the required direction when in the water, even if it handles fairly well on land, and to get it to swim in a dead straight line to an unseen bird is a work of art indeed.

Over here few people pay the attention to working a retriever by signals when it is in water, or at any rate not to the same extent as an American shooter would. In the first place few of us shoot over very vast stretches of water and, of course, our field trials never put a dog through anything like the gruelling tests that they would receive in the U.S.A. In fact one one can say that the majority of retriever trials in this country do not even include a water test, which is regrettable, but, due, in most cases, to the difficulty in obtaining a suitable ground which will contain a good water test.

Corporal Punishment

My recent notes on the subject of punishment have also provoked some correspondence. Reader H.D. (Cheshire) has this to say: "Your article on corporal punishment decided me to drop you a line hoping that you can forward any part of it you think fit to people who intend training a springer. For a wildfowler or rough shooter who has no intention of showing his dog or putting it in field trials I say *use no force* (whips and what-have-you.) You have one dog and time to spare. When it is a tiny pup playing in front of the fire you see various expressions in its eyes. Learn to read them and after a while you find yourself able to tell what it is about to do next. As your pup grows you will be able to read expression, and when training commences the pup becomes aware that its every move is anticipated. It knows when

being brushed and combed by rough handling (which springers enjoy) that its master is all-powerful. Now 'spoil' your puppy with affection only.

"Have a slobbering, lick-spitting springer, as J. Wentworth-Day calls them. They thrive on it—a harsh word makes them miserable and a *very* rare slap (I use it for stealing only) is the end of the world. Move slowly at all times—a fast movement will alarm a pup. If it is shy of anything, build confidence on that weak spot. If it is water, drop the dummy in a puddle, then in water six inches out of its depth, then completely out of its depth, and your 'water shy' puppy will be swimming before he knows it. The puppy might riot now and then, but I think all men who shoot over rough marshes would prefer a bold, cheeky dog which would crash through a half-frozen bog to retrieve a duck to one of those 'well trained, a bit whipped and slightly scared' dogs who just would not have the confidence to go the extra fifty yards of bog for the duck they know is there. As for a cowardly dog, I would only pay enough for powder and shot to destroy it—worse than useless. No! Throw away your whip, one-dog-shooter—you do not need it."

A Lot of Sound Sense

The attitude of my correspondent may seem, to some people, to be unduly soft on the dog, but there is a lot of sound commonsense in it. I feel that H.D. may have got the impression from my article on the subject that I consider punishment to be essential in training, but this is definitely not the case. Plenty of dogs get through their entire training course without corporal punishment—in fact, the majority of well-bred gundogs can do so. With the sensitive and willing-to-please type of dog you may never be called up to inflict punishment, certainly nothing more severe than a shaking and a rating. But where punishment is really called for, with a difficult dog or for a serious and well understood crime, then it should be prompt and effective. Although the writer refers in particular to spaniels, his advice is equally valuable to the owner of a gundog of any breed.

Certainly anyone acquiring a good puppy at weaning age—eight to ten weeks old—should, given time and patience—be able to train it to a very high degree of perfection without having to resort to punishment, just as H.D. suggests. In order to ensure the best possible results with a gundog, I certainly advise the one-dog shooter to acquire his puppy as young as possible, so that he can teach it right from wrong as a matter of course. Many puppies of what we may regard as "training age"—six to nine months—have acquired certain bad habits and are not so easily moulded to our will as will be a younger animal. It is certainly amazing what can be learned from, and taught to, a very young puppy, and the one-dog-man has everything to gain by obtaining his gundog at a really tender age—as soon as it is weaned.

A word of caution—beware the puppy which has been weaned too early. In my opinion, no puppy should be offered for sale before it is at least eight weeks of age. A good start in life is essential for man and beast, and most bitches will be able to feed their pups (at least *help* to feed them) up to the age stated. By seven weeks the pups may only be receiving one or two feeds a day from their dam, but it is the finest possible food.

Field Trials

Good news comes from the Kennel Club. At last it has been decided that spaniels or retrievers which have been awarded a prize at a Utility Gundog Society trial shall be eligible to compete in field trial classes at shows. The inability of such prize winners to do so in the past has created much discontent and misunderstanding among gundog men, particularly keepers who are keen on showing. The U.G.S. has been wise to press for this decision, and will be grateful to its representative on the F.T. Council (Mr. W. Grant Fiske) for his efforts in this direction.

The Field Trials Committee is circulating spaniel societies, and mention is made of what a spaniel should be expected to achieve in the field. An extract from this communication is reproduced hereunder, and will be greatly welcomed by those of us who are interested in spaniels, the more so if judges bear the suggestions in mind when officiating at trials.

"While the committee wishes to impress the importance of a good retrieve, some judges during the past season have requested spaniels to collect over abnormally long distances, and too much importance has been placed in the ability or otherwise of the spaniel to accomplish this. In other instances, spaniels have been sent on long blind retrieves without the spaniel or the handler being in the line at the time the game was killed. It is with these facts in mind that the committee wishes to point out that the normal retrieve for a spaniel is of game found and sprung by the spaniel and shot by its handler.

"The committee also recommend that a spaniel should not be sent on long distance retrieves unless the judge feels satisfied the dog working was so positioned to have every reasonable chance to mark, and therefore to collect.

"When in doubt the judge should instruct the handler to take his dog to reasonable gunshot distance of the fall and cast from that point. The dog should then cast out freely and collect without undue loss of time. A good collection and retrieve should complete previous good hunting and ground work, which made the shot possible.

"Full credit should be given for accurate marking, but under no circumstances should a good retrieve cover faults or weaknesses which may be apparent at other times, such as lack of drive while questing, ground treatment, gamefinding and steadiness."

Wildfowling Clubs

The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland: Hon. Secretary, Lt.-Commdr. J. W. Anderton, R.N.V.R., 19 Castle Street, Liverpool, 2.

The annual general meeting of The North Cheshire Wildfowlers' Club took place at the Boar's Head Hotel, Market Place, Stockport, on June 18. The chair was occupied by our worthy president Mr. J. B. Brough. The following officers and executive committee were elected for the coming year: President, Mr. J. B. Brough; vice-presidents: Mr. S. M. Bjornsen, Lt.-Col. J. Patchett, O.B.E., Mr. H. Payne; chairman, Mr. K. F. Hughes; vice-chairman, Mr. C. H. Fox; hon. treasurer: Mr. W. E. Sutcliffe; hon. secretary, Mr. B. F. Wiedemam; hon. librarian, Mr. T. Bradbury. Executive committee: Messrs. A. Dickson, J. Kent, T. A. Booth, W. E. Lea, F. E. Bullock, A. Allcock, J. Buck, R. Warrington, H. Bromley, B. Pickering, W. J. Bardsley, T. C. Bennison, and W. E. Davies. In view of the new blood on the various committees, it is anticipated that the club should be strengthened, and its activities become more varied, and that all will endeavour to give our chairman their support during his term of office.

It was most regrettable that the balance sheet on this occasion could not be accepted, but every endeavour is being made to submit a more detailed statement whereby all will be satisfied. A very interesting item was resolved whereby the annual subscriptions in future will be Junior Members 16 to 19 years, £1. Senior Members oved 19 years, £1 10s. Entrance fee in all cases 2s. 6d., these subs. will cover third party insurance on all club shoots, also each member will receive his copy of our local *North Cheshire Wildfowler*. The secretary informs all members that subscriptions are due for payment on September 1 each year, and that only fully paid up members will be allowed on Club shoots.

Members are reminded that clay pigeon shooting takes place on Sundays at the Horsfield Arms, Brinnington, Stockport, and all members are welcome.

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Once again the annual clay pigeon shoot of The Hull and East Riding W.A. was a great success, there being an interval in the rainy weather at the time of the shoot. There were 34 competitors, many of whom had brought their friends to enjoy the sport. The first shot was fired at 2.30 p.m. Every competitor had a practice ten rounds at skeet, then another ten rounds to count for the competition. The final results were obtained by summing the score for the second ten shots and the handicap which had been given on last year's shoot. All new members, and those who had not shot previously, were given a handicap of three. The winner was Mr. J. Pickering who shot magnificently and well deserved the cup. The other finalists in order were Messrs. F. Mason, C. R. Martin, J. W. Coupland, G. Laverack, E. Hurd, D. Gregson and W. Dean. Messrs. S. Phillips and F. W. Jefferson shot for the consolation prize.

Nine prizes had been donated by members and these were presented by Mrs. Bradley, wife of one of the earliest members of the Association. Mrs. Bradley performed her task with great charm and very obvious pleasure, for she appeared to know most of the winners quite well. She was thanked by the Association's president, Mr. L. T. Field, who noted there was a much higher standard of shooting this year than in previous years which would result in better sportsmanship and few wounded birds.

The thanks of the whole Association are extended to Mr. Field for generously providing the clays, as he has done for every annual shoot. It was rgeretted that Mr. B. Andersen who donated the cup three years ago was not present. Thanks were also given to Mr. J. Wheater who attended to the traps and called the shots. Several members stayed behind after the competition to enjoy some down-the-line shooting, but rain spoiled matters.

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At a recent meeting of the Home Counties Wildfowlers' Association held at The Swan, Cosmo Place, members listened to a most interesting and informative talk by Mr. J. Gow, who chose as his subject, "The Law and the Wildfowler." Mr. Gow, after having been introduced by Mr. E. Parish, the chairman, dealt with the game laws and all the various acts dealing with licences, highways, firearms, trespass, and the protection of birds. He then examined the law of the foreshore, with a very clear explanation of the basis of common law. Some very interesting points of the legal recognition of tides, saltings, sea-walks, foreshore rights and decoy ponds were disected and explained, and then Mr. Gow dealt most ably with a considerable number of members' questions.

The members present were indebted to Mr. Gow, who was so obviously at home in a company of fowlers, for clarifying so many points and for bringing to such an academic subject, the very breath of the foreshore.

Forthcoming Field Trials

SECRETARIES OF FIELD TRIAL SOCIETIES ARE INVITED TO SEND US REPORTS OF THEIR TRIALS FOR PUBLICATION IN "THE SHOOTING TIMES." REPORTS SHOULD BE SENT DIRECT TO THE KENNEL EDITOR, MR. P. R. A. MOXON, HERNE COMMON, HERNE BAY, KENT.

Aug. 1 and 2: Northern Ireland Pointer Club. On the moors, outside Ballymena. Judges: Mr. T. Wilson and Miss Macintosh. Secretary: W. R. Gardiner, 12 Swanston Crescent, Glengormley, Belfast.

Aug. 2 & 3: Scottish Gundog Association (Pointers and Setters). Secretary: J. M. Manson, Glengour House, Ferryhills, Inverkeithing, Fife.

Aug. 3: Ulster Gundog League (Pointers and Setters). Carnalbanagh, Aughafatten, Co. Antrim. Secretary: S. B. Cunningham, The Northern Whig Ltd., Bridge Street, Belfast.

Aug. 5 & 6: Scottish Field Trials Association (Pointers and Setters). Yester, E. Lothian. Secretary: R. Lawder, Brownmoor House, Ecclefechan, Lockerbie, Dumfriesshire.

Aug. 7 & 8: Northern Counties Pointer and Setter Society. Secretary: Mrs. E. J. Buist, Larchwood, Delny, Ross-shire.

The Mysterious Beeches

by Taproot

I HAVE a liking for avenues that lead nowhere. These curiosities crop up sometimes in a strange hunting country, or when shooting with new friends. I am quite a connoisseur of their atmosphere and derelict charms. Now and then certain humps and bumps in a nearby meadow suggest the foundations of a once proud mansion, but often there is no clue, no hint of purpose—simply the two ranks of ancient trees marooned in a secret past guessing.

As it happens, we possess an example of sorts in this very parish. It is said to be part of The Pilgrim's Way, but I am less interested in its obscure destination than in the remarkable trees that compose it. The grandest section marches across a bracken-covered plateau not far from a secondary road. At a point of probable convergence a group of cottages rather confuses the trail, but, farther on, trees of the same type and age occur by the roadside and there is little doubt that highway and avenue once were one.

Arborial Phantasy

The trees themselves are beeches—beeches of a quiddity you would not expect to meet outside an Emmett drawing. Never was such a riot of arborial phantasy. The trunks or boles are rarely more than ten feet high, ribbed with great outcropping sinews, eye-holed, and carbuncled. Crotchety knuckles of root anchor them to the sandy soil. But at the crowns all tension is suddenly released in a clean lift of springing growth; perhaps five or six, perhaps a dozen limbs spring skywards to lose themselves in leafy height.

In mediaeval times the neighbourhood supported a branch of the iron-smelting industry. According to local tradition, Queen Elizabeth, riding through the forest, was appalled by the indescriminate felling to provide fuel for the furnaces. She gave orders that trees above a certain girth intended for the axe should be pollarded to preserve the germ of life. This has long been the accepted explanation of our contorted giants.

Lately, many of these trees have become dangerous. Sometimes the tall limbs derive from rotting crowns in a kind of right-angled bend that has to carry their full weight. Every gale brings down one or two more, and usually there is a clean break at the point of attachment. Motorists have had narrow escapes and now the county council has called in tree surgeons to carry out a bit of necessary amputation.

Some of these experts scorn the pollarding theory. They say the Elizabethan woodcutters would have experienced immense difficulty in severing any large timber tree ten feet from the ground. They might have driven waggons alongside to provide raised platforms for the workmen, but even that would not have been as easy as it sounds.

Coppicing Rotation

A more likely explanation, some think, is the process of "coppicing" still practised today. The most common coppiced varieties are birch and chestnut, although beech responds well to the same treatment. Under this system, at intervals of twelve to fifteen years, growth is cut hard back to the stocks or crowns which shoot again to provide another crop in due course. Regular coppicing of sections of woodland is an aid to good management of a pheasant shoot because it provides a rotation of holding cover.

It is possible that the bewitched characters in our avenue may be nothing more mysterious than coppiced stocks left to grow unchecked through several centuries, until, today, the crowns once axed to ground level are ten feet high, and the "poles" a hundred feet and more.

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Grouse Prospects for 1957

(Continued from page 602)

district had a period of depression after the war, which has fortunately begun to recede. A lot of the moor is high, and that condition often makes for uncertain shooting seasons. Grouse leave the tops during severe wintry weather, and may not return at nesting time; and it is probable also that the misty, drizzly spells, which are common above the thousand feet contour, favour the incidence of disease. However, all is well this year. This is a keeper's estimate: "I am expecting the grouse bags this season to be as good as we have had since the war. We had about six inches of snow during the sitting period, but it seems to have done no harm. At least, I have seen none.

"Two nests which I marked when the snow was bad both hatched normally. Nests were quite good; the ones I knew of averaged eight eggs. The coveys now average about seven young. If no dwindling occurs among the broods through coccidiosis between now and the end of the month, the prospects are good."

In this selection of Scottish reports there is not the slightest mention of strongylosis, the dreaded "grouse disease," which can wipe out the birds on a moor more completely than anything else. But south of the Border in the North Riding of Yorkshire one keeper speaks of some diseased birds that had been picked up on neighbouring ground. Whether this was the real thing or not we have no means of discovering; but the gist of the letter suggests that the mortality is entirely local. This is what the keeper says: "The grouse have nested very well here, clutches of seven to ten eggs being the rule. Owing to the fine and mild weather during April and May, grouse hatched early. We saw some chicks in the last week of April. Since then the weather has been exceptionally dry; so the broods have done well. This means that grouse should be well forward for the Twelfth. I hear that a few diseased birds had been picked up higher in the dale. They had prominent breasts, but this outbreak has not spread. On the whole I should predict a good shooting season."

The next report comes from a shooting man, who lives in the Keighley area. He owns no moorland, but he has plenty of keeper friends, and is keenly interested in grouse. He writes: "You are rather early yet to get a real estimate of prospects. However, I will give you as honest an account as possible, supplemented by the opinions of local gamekeepers.

"We had a very mild winter followed by a cold, dry spring. Birds were in good condition, though in short supply when they went down on eggs. I should say that the average of known nests was rather more than 6½, but not quite 7. They hatched off well between May 7 and 14, which will ensure strong birds for the 12th.

"Lately it has been too dry. The young grouse are all concentrated near the springs and mossy bogs. This, as you know, can give a wrong impression of a moor's population, if one did not know that the rest of a dry moor held only old, barren pairs. These are, however, few here. By and large, the future does not look too bad, although there is always danger from foxes, carrion crows, black-backed gulls, and, worst of all, *fire*. There are at least two fires burning now, although yesterday and today quite a lot of rain fell; but when fire gets a couple of feet into the peat, it takes a lot of rain to put it out. Nothing else will."

A Grand Lot

The last report describes conditions in Wharfedale. Here it is: "Regarding your inquiry about grouse prospects in this area, I am very happy to be able to tell you that the outlook is much better than it has been for a few years.

"It has been a wonderful nesting season, most birds were down on their eggs a week or more earlier than usual. The clutches were not big, but perhaps just slightly above average. I saw three clutches of 10, half-a-dozen of eight, two of nine, and more than a score of seven, and just a few of six. I first saw sitting 'foil' on April 6; then on the night of April 11 we had three degrees of frost, and on the night of April 13 five degrees. But these cold snaps did not affect the eggs; for most of the nests which I knew had clean hatches. The result is that we have a grand lot of strong young grouse, with just a few odd late broods; and although it will not be a bumper season, I am quite confident at this stage that it will be above average."

(More reports from the moors will appear next week).

Groups and Grouping

(Continued from page 609)

group are measured and averaged.

When the centre of the group has been determined, and not before, *the rifle should have the sights and aim adjusted so that the centre of the group should fall in the centre of the bull.* The next batch of ten shots fired should group together in the region of the bull. If they all group in the bull, the first real step forward on the fascinating, though at many times disappointing, road to marksmanship has been made.

Remember, the rifle shoots to a definite group, nothing alters that group (though it may grow larger with the passage of time), and that provided the sportsman learns to appreciate the particular grouping quality of his firearm and appreciates that he is aiming at the centre of that group and not an individual bullet, consistently good scoring should follow automatically.

It is equally important for the field shooter to ascertain his grouping qualities of the rifle he is using. Firing single shots and correcting aim or sights after an obvious miss means that the sportsman is not aiming with the centre of the group. This single shot shooting and correcting is the cause of 9 out of 10 misses or badly wounded game.

I have maintained, in common with others before me, that matches are won or lost by trigger release; but long before that stage is reached by the matchmen the problem of grouping has been appreciated, understood, and enlisted. It is up to the field sportsman to do the same.

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CARTRIDGES, 3,000, 12G, 6 shot, clean and dry, boxed in 25s (ex W.D.) (C.A.C.), £1 per 100 for the lot collected, Birmingham area.—Box A. 3439.

CLAY TARGETS, £5/5/0 per cylinder of 770 ex works, plus cylinder deposit of £2.—The Gun Club, Limited, Gun Club Works, Crayford, Kent.

EX-GOVT. surplus cartridges. Send s.a.e. for lists.—Hercules Armament Co. Ltd., 8 St. Martin's Street, London, W.C.2.

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WESTLEY RICHARDS 12G, hammerless ejector, selective single trigger, 30in. unmarked barrels ¼ and ½, excellent pattern, rubber recoil pad, mint condition, little used, £100; seen by appointment.—B. Page, 17 Comberton Road, Kidderminster.

12-BORE double hammerless ejector by F. Rhodes, immaculate, complete case and cleaning materials, £50 o.n.o.—Hoseason, 66 Wokingham Road, Reading, Berks.

16-BORE HAMMERLESS ejector by Lewes, £32/10/0; 12-bore, double English hammerless, 2¾in., £28/10/0; 2¾in., £27/10/0; single, 12 ejector, £10.—264 Staines Road East, Sunbury (3506) on Thames.

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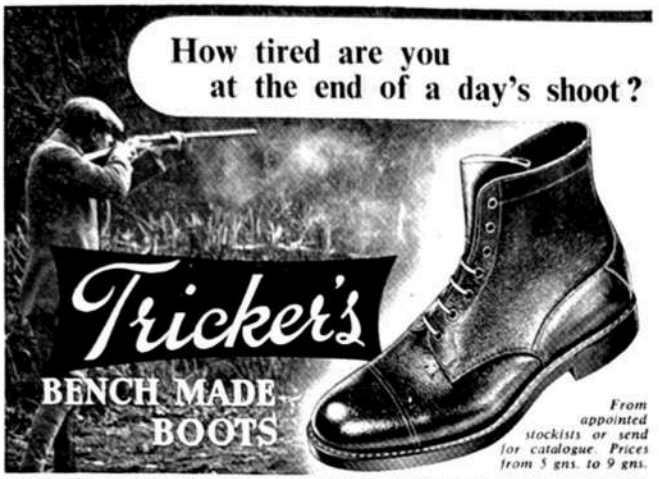

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